JULY 2019 VOLUME 29 ISSUE 7

BFI

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight&Sound

£5.25
9 770037 480113 07

JIM JARMUSCH ON

THE DEAD DON'T DIE

CANNES SPECIAL

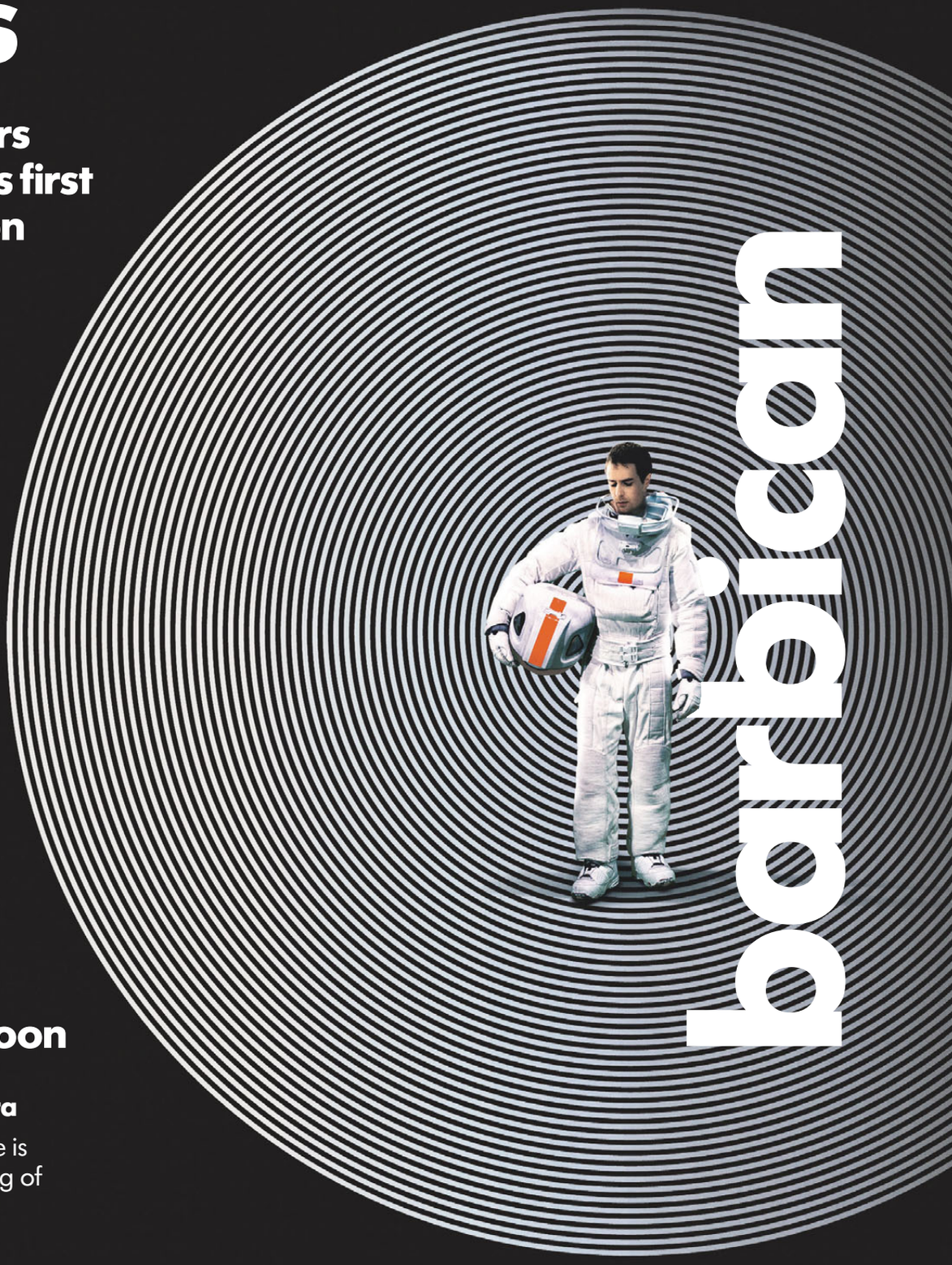
NEW FILMS FROM QUENTIN TARANTINO, KEN LOACH, TERRENCE MALICK, CELINE SCIAMMA, MATI DIOP, THE DARDENNE BROTHERS, PEDRO ALMODOVAR, BONG JOONHO, ARNAUD DESPLECHIN, MARCO BELLOCCHIO AND MORE

PLUS

● PAULINE KAEL ● THE GOLDEN AGE OF MEXICAN CINEMA ● 'IN FABRIC' ● 'SUPPORT THE GIRLS'

Otherworldly scores

Marking 50 years since humanity's first step on the Moon



Fri 19 Jul

Clint Mansell: Moon

with the London Contemporary Orchestra

Mansell's otherworldly score is performed live to a screening of the film for the first time

Sat 20 Jul

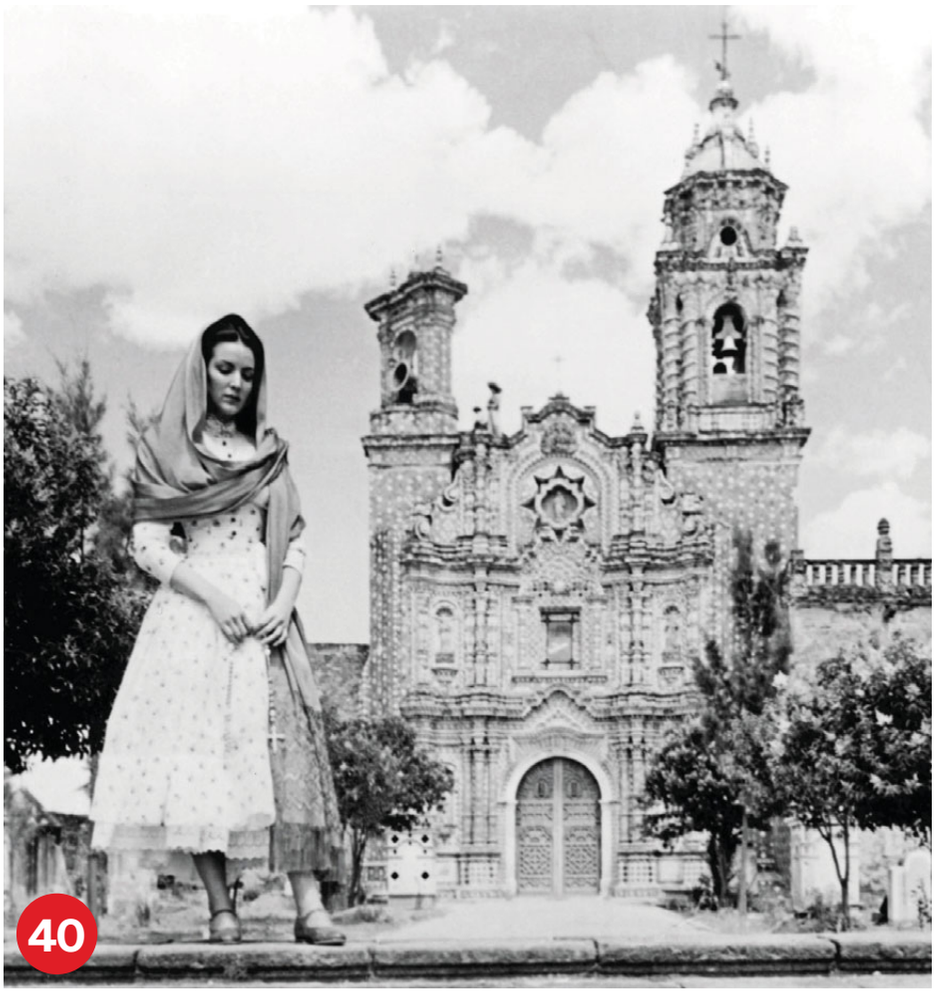
Icebreaker: Apollo

Performing Brian Eno's ambient masterpiece, alongside footage from Al Reinert's *For All Mankind*

The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre

© 2009 Lunar Industries Limited. All Rights Reserved.

Contents July 2019



Deep Focus: The Golden Age of Mexican cinema

During the middle decades of the last century, Mexico became a powerhouse for film production in Latin America, with directors and stars who created a cinema so vivid that it helped to define Mexican identity to a population struggling to adapt in an era of rapid modernisation. By **Chloë Roddick**

FEATURES

18
COVER FEATURE
Grave situation
Jim Jarmusch's zombie movie *The Dead Don't Die* has fun playing with genre conventions without ever losing sight of its deadly serious theme of environmental destruction. He talks to **Geoff Andrew**

22
Cannes: pulp fictions
With Bong Joonho's darkly comic satire *Parasite* picking up the Palme d'Or and a marauding horde of zombies, crime thrillers, sci-fi films and quasi westerns following up the rear, this year's festival saw a culture shift toward genre cinema – and a simultaneous boost in the quality and range of films on offer. By **Nick James** PLUS **Isabel Stevens** reports on the most exciting discoveries from new directors on the Croisette

30
Serving time
A comic portrait of the friendship between female staff at a Hooters-style restaurant, Andrew Bujalski's *Support the Girls* should finally provide the breakthrough he deserves. He talks to **Jamie Dunn**

34
Looking sharp: the legacy of Pauline Kael
On the centenary of her birth we look back at a peerless film critic who still inspires loyal adulation and bitter enmity like no other. By **Farran Smith Nehme** PLUS a previously unpublished transcript of a discussion event with Kael at London's National Film Theatre in 1982

REGULARS

5 **Editorial** Kicking Cannes

Rushes
6 **On Our Radar:** This month's highlights, from an exhibition of David Lynch's paintings to new Blu-ray releases
8 **Interview: Trevor Johnston** talks to DP Anthony Richmond about filming *Don't Look Now*
9 **Dream Palaces: Wanuri Kahiu** recalls Nairobi's Fox Drive-In Theatre
11 **Industry: Charles Gant** on activism at the box office

Wide Angle
12 **Profile: Anne Morra** celebrates the feminist schlock of Stephanie Rothman
15 **Primal Screen: Pamela Hutchinson** on a newly restored Clarence Brown film
16 **Preview: Henry K. Miller** revisits a night at London's Film Society in 1934

95 **Letters**

Endings
96 **Andrew Roberts** hails the dark twist at the end of *Kind Hearts and Coronets*

"NICOLAS ROEG'S GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT...A MASTERPIECE"
Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

★★★★★ Empire

THE BEST BRITISH FILM OF ALL TIME
Time Out Poll 2018

★★★★★ Radio Times

JULIE CHRISTIE

DONALD SUTHERLAND

Directed by NICOLAS ROEG DAPHNE DU MAURIER'S

"DON'T LOOK NOW"

BRAND NEW 4K RESTORATION - BACK IN CINEMAS JULY 5

VINTAGE CLASSICS UHD COLLECTOR'S EDITION JULY 29

JULIE CHRISTIE DONALD SUTHERLAND in "DON'T LOOK NOW" produced by PETER KATZ directed by NICOLAS ROEG executive producer ANTHONY B. UNGER music by PINO DONNAGIO based on the novel by DAPHNE DU MAURIER screenplay by ALLAN SCOTT and CHRIS BRYANT

© 1973 National Film Ventures. All rights reserved.

STUDIOCANAL

Sight&Sound

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE BFI

Editorial enquiries
21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN
t: 020 7255 1444
w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound
e: S&S@bfi.org.uk

Social media
f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag
t: twitter.com/SightSoundmag
i: instagram.com/sightsoundmagazine

Subscriptions
t: 020 8955 7070
e: sightandsound@abacusemedia.com
Volume 29 Issue 7 (NS)
ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

CONTRIBUTORS

Geoff Andrew is programmer-at-large at BFI Southbank
Dan Callahan is the author of the two-volume *The Art of American Screen Acting*
Alex Davidson is a cinema curator at the Barbican, London
Jamie Dunn is film editor at *The Skinny*
Erica Eisen is a writer, editor and journalist based in London
Charles Gant is the features editor of *Screen International*
Pamela Hutchinson is the author of the BFI Classic on *Pandora's Box*
Trevor Johnston is a freelance film critic
Philip Kemp is a freelance critic and film historian
Henry K. Miller is writing a book about Hitchcock
Anne Morra is associate curator in the department of film at MoMA
Nick Pinkerton is a critic and programmer based in New York
Tony Rayns is a film critic, commentator, festival programmer and screenwriter
Andrew Roberts is a critic and film historian
Chloë Roddick is programmer at the Morelia film festival in Mexico
Farran Smith Nehme writes about film at selfstyledsiren.blogspot.com
Lou Thomas is a film critic and digital production editor of bfi.org.uk

COVER

Cover design by Bobo

NEXT ISSUE

Digital edition available on 8 July
On UK newsstands on 11 July

BFI Film Forever

Contents Reviews

FILMS OF THE MONTH

50 *Apollo 11*
52 *Diego Maradona*
54 *In Fabric*
56 *Knife+Heart*

FILMS

58 *Aladdin*
58 *Ama-San*
59 *Amin*
60 *Avengers: Endgame*
61 *Booksmart*
62 *Brightburn*
63 *The Captor*
63 *The Corrupted*
64 *The Curse of La Llorona*
65 *Division 19*
65 *Ferrante Fever*
66 *The Flood*
68 *Halston*
68 *The Hustle*
69 *Ibiza: The Silent Movie*
70 *I Love My Mum*
70 *In Safe Hands*
71 *John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum*
72 *Mari*
73 *Never Look Away*
74 *Pokémon: Detective Pikachu*
74 *Prisoners of the Moon*
75 *Prophecy*
76 *Rocketman*
76 *A Season in France*
77 *The Secret Life of Pets 2*
78 *Support the Girls*
79 *Vita & Virginia*
79 *We the Animals*
80 *Yesterday*

HOME CINEMA

83 *Bellman and True; Everybody in Our Family; A Face in the Crowd; The Heiress; The Holy Mountain; How I Won the War; The Landlord; The Last Warning; Nightfall; No Orchids for Miss Blandish; One, Two, Three; Track 29; Under Fire*

DVD features

82 **Robert Hanks** relishes the adult romance of Jack Clayton's *Room at the Top*
85 **Revival: Tony Rayns** on *noir* classic *The Big Clock*, by the underrated John Farrow
86 **Television: Robert Hanks** reviews the long lost *Orson Welles Great Mysteries*
89 **Lost and Found: Erica Eisen** makes the case for Giorgi Shengelaia's dreamlike portrait of the artist *Pirosmani*

BOOKS

90 **Nick Pinkerton** is gripped by J. Hoberman's smart, ambitious movie history of the Reagan years
91 **Dan Callahan** is exhausted and exhilarated by the definitive life of singer and actor Bing Crosby
92 **Pamela Hutchinson** applauds two revisionist histories of women in Hollywood

56

61

72

63

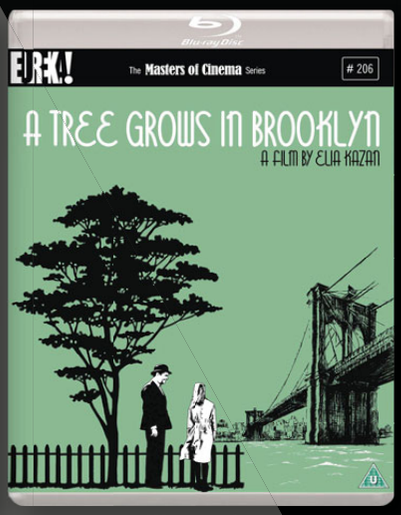
And online this month Todd Douglas Miller on *Apollo 11* | Tezuka Osamu's short films | Sheffield Doc/Fest, Ambulante, Annecy, Alchemy film festivals... and more bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

The **Masters of Cinema** Series

EUREKA! CLASSICS

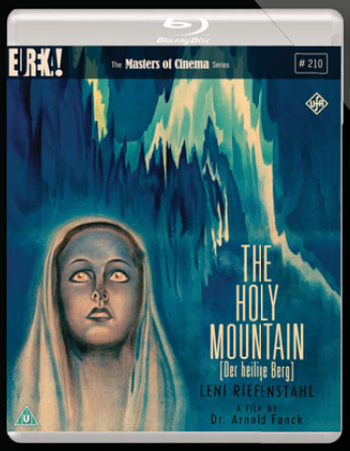
montage PICTURES

AVAILABLE JULY 2019



4K transfer

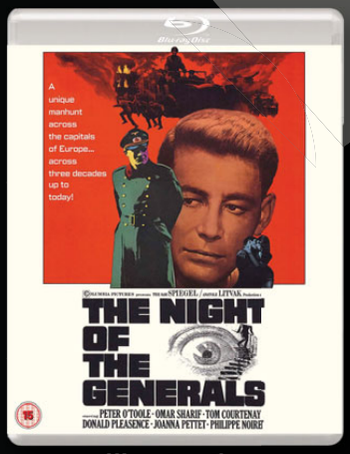
AVAILABLE JUNE 2019



2K restoration

New 2K restorations

OUT NOW



4K restoration

FOR FULL DETAILS ABOUT ALL THE RELEASES PLEASE VISIT

eurekavideo.co.uk

EUREKA!

Twitter: @eurekavideo
Facebook: EurekaEntertainment
Instagram: EurekaEntertainment

AVAILABLE FROM amazon.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor
Nick James
Deputy editor
Kieron Corless
Features editor
James Bell
Web editor
Nick Bradshaw
Production editor
Isabel Stevens
Chief sub-editor
Jamie McLeish
Sub-editors
Robert Hanks
Jane Lamacraft
Researchers
Mar Diestro-Dópido
Tom Williams
Credits supervisor
Patrick Fahy
Credits associates
Kevin Lyons
Pieter Sonke
James Piers Taylor
Design and art direction
chrisbrawndesign.com
Origination
Rhapsody
Printer
Wyndeham Group

BUSINESS

Publisher
Rob Winter
Publishing coordinator
Brenda Fernandes
Advertising consultant
Ronnie Hackston
T: 020 7957 8916
M: 07799 605 212
E: ronnie.hackston@bfi.org.uk

Newsstand distribution
Seymour
T: 020 7429 4000
E: info@seymour.co.uk

Bookshop distribution
Central Books
T: 020 8525 8800
E: contactus@centralbooks.com

Sight & Sound is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (which regulates the UK's magazine and newspaper industry). We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism. If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint please contact rob.winter@bfi.org.uk. If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by UKP Worldwide, 3390 Rand Road, South Plainfield, NJ 07080

Periodicals Postage Paid at South Plainfield, NJ

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight and Sound c/o 3390 Rand Road, South Plainfield NJ 07080.

Subscription office:
For subscription queries and sales of back issues and binders contact:
Subscription Department
Sight & Sound
Abacus
21 Southampton Row
London WC1B 5HA
T: 020 8955 7070
F: 020 8421 8244
E: sightandsound@abacusemedia.com

Annual subscription rates:
UK £50, Eire and ROW £75
15% discount for BFI members

Copyright © BFI, 2019

The views and opinions expressed in the pages of this magazine or on its website are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily those of the BFI or its employees. The contents of this magazine may not be used or reproduced without the written permission of the Publisher.

The BFI is a charity, (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON COOPER AT WWW.COOPERILLO.COM

Editorial Nick James

KICKING CANNES

"How Quentin Tarantino Saved Cannes..." is half the headline of an editorial by *Variety*'s Peter Debruge musing on what he argues is the parlous state of the world's most famous and prestigious film festival. My first reaction on reading it was to cry: "US imperialism!" In fact, Debruge's article is scrupulous in laying out what he thinks was successful, and what less so, from all the films on the Croisette this year. But I still disagree with much of his analysis, and those differences of opinion are indicative of wider problems cinema faces.

Debruge is right to say that the street crowds have been shrinking in Cannes and that the couple of days that Tarantino's film *Once upon a Time in Hollywood* was showing were the busiest. It's also true that, aside from the Tarantino screening, critics' queues were shorter than usual. But since the festival had radically changed its press screenings this year, it was hard to judge how many press were accredited. And since Tarantino's film did not seem to have one of the new early screenings for TV people that had diminished queues for the other films, it's little wonder this one was so long.

Debruge's response to *Once upon a Time...* suggests that he's just fed up with Cannes. Having dismissed the film as "something of a disappointment... [a] 159-minute fetish exercise – an epic homage to dirty feet, neon-lit classic LA dives and showbiz in-jokes", he goes on to say that there was "nary a clap at the press screening... (unusual for such a hotly anticipated title, but a clear sign that this is far from Tarantino's best)". Actually, Manohla Dargis in the *New York Times* thought it was "well received in the press screening"; I certainly didn't think the response was in any way flat or unusual, even if a note from Tarantino read out on stage, asking for no spoilers, did annoy the press. Cannes is never the cheerleading forum that Sundance often seems to be.

In contrast, Debruge boosts Venice for bagging last year's Netflix films and being more useful in terms of Oscar campaigns. I'm a huge fan of Venice, too, and there's no question that last year was a coup. But I challenge Debruge's insistence that "not a single [Cannes] edition this century can rival last year's Venice lineup, which boasted not just *Roma*, *A Star Is Born* and *First Man*, but new films from Yorgos Lanthimos, Mike Leigh, Jacques Audiard, Carlos Reygadas, László Nemes and Olivier Assayas." Most years at Cannes since 2001 have been at least as strong. And while Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma*, Lanthimos's *The Favourite*, Audiard's *The Sisters Brothers* and Nemes's *Sunset* are first rate, most of the other films Debruge mentions are not the directors' best works. By the way, if rubberneckers are a measure of success for Debruge, it's worth pointing out that there are hardly any on the Lido.

Debruge talks in terms of Cannes needing US films to get the festival the attention it wants. Maybe he's

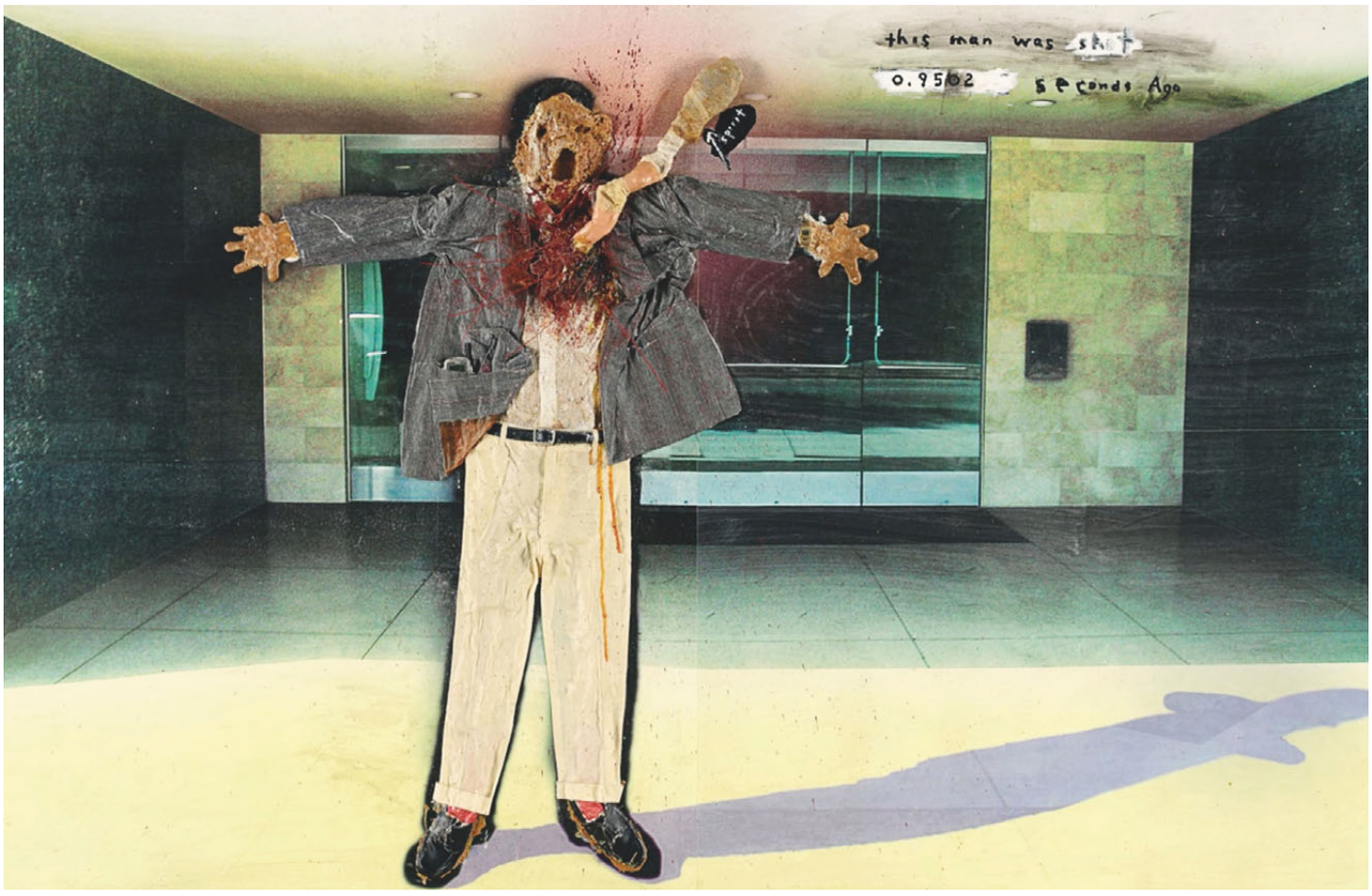
'How Quentin Tarantino Saved Cannes...' read half the headline of a 'Variety' editorial. My first reaction on reading it was to cry: 'US imperialism!'

right, maybe Cannes does need Americans – but look again at that Venice line-up he rates so highly: a Mexican film set in Mexico, a Hungarian film set in Hungary, an American western from a French director, a British costume drama from a Greek director. The popularity and critical success of *A Star Is Born* and *First Man* are undeniable, but the impression I have from Cannes, and other recent festivals, is that the US is producing fewer films of really high quality, perhaps because so much talent is being siphoned into TV.

I disagree with Debruge about so many of the films in Cannes he discusses that it's clear we have very different taste. One point where we can agree, however, is the second half of that *Variety* headline: "...While Abdellatif Kechiche Set It Back a Decade." Kechiche's *Mektoub, My Love: Intermezzo* (see page 26) was the talk of the festival in the worst possible way – though many French critics were fans. Debruge castigates festival director Thierry Frémaux (with whom he evidently has a serious beef), citing rumours that he selected the film after seeing only 25 minutes of it. (Debruge might like to register the irony that the first part of Kechiche's trilogy, *Mektoub, My Love: Canto Uno*, played at Venice.)

But Debruge's comment that "more people were tuned in to the finale of HBO's *Game of Thrones* than what was happening in Cannes" is just a cheap shot. That statement – which would apply to any film festival – really does have the tang of US imperialism. The success of long-form TV series is a problem for cinema, not just for Cannes. Under assault by superhero movies, and the franchise content central to Disney's plans to rival Netflix, quality cinema looks destined to become a smaller phenomenon – and this is a situation for which the American cinema industry may not be as well geared as the rest of the world. The Cannes winner, Bong Joonho's *Parasite*, demonstrates that superbly.

ON OUR RADAR



Explosive talent: ***This Man Was Shot 0.9502 Seconds Ago*** **(2004)**

DAVID LYNCH
MY HEAD IS DISCONNECTED

HOME Manchester, 6 July – 29 September

It was painting that propelled David Lynch into filmmaking, or so the light-bulb-moment story goes. In the late 1960s, when he was studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Lynch was working on a picture of a garden at night. From within the image he heard the sound of the wind and saw the plants begin to rustle. He swears he wasn't high. "Oh this is interesting," he thought, "a moving painting."

Lynch is primarily known as a master surrealist of the moving image, but painting caught his imagination first. At 16 he would stay late painting in the studio he shared with his friend (and later production designer) Jack Fisk. In Lynch's hybrid memoir *Room to Dream*, co-written with Kristine McKenna, Fisk recalls how Lynch's fascination with violence had taken hold even then, remembering his delight at the swirls a trapped moth made in one of his oil paintings.

Lynch never stopped painting and making sculptures, returning to art between film projects, perhaps enjoying the solitary nature of this line of creativity, the freedom from commercial pressures. Now, along with transcendental meditation, it's increasingly the 73-year-old polymath's primary focus.

Alongside a programme of films and discussions, HOME Manchester's celebration of Lynch hosts an exhibition of 60 of Lynch's creations from the 60s to the present. They include drawings made on matchboxes in the 70s, large-scale mixed-media paintings and his curious collection of lamp sculptures. Lynch's love of texture and close-ups of objects is noticeable. No surprise from the creator of *Twin Peaks*, with its log lady and forest setting, that wood features heavily ("one of the greatest materials to work with"). While not quite as freaky as his films, his collages have their own stories and characters – even a sympathetic, lost version of Bob, the demonic killer of *Twin Peaks*. Many filmmakers have painted, but there is a special allure in the way Lynch's labyrinthine universe spills out of his films on to the canvas.

Isabel Stevens

Bob Finds Himself in a World for Which He Has No Understanding **(2000)**

My Head Is Disconnected (1996)

Woman with Small Dead Bird (2018)

WHAT TO VISIT

* **Cinema seasons** 'Nineties: Young Cinema Rebels' remembers the insurgent films from that decade that subverted cinema's conventions – among them Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* and Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* (BFI Southbank, London, throughout June). 'After the Wave' explores the generation of filmmakers – Chantal Akerman, Catherine Breillat and Philippe Garrel among them – who emerged after the *nouvelle vague* and the civil unrest and protests of May 1968 (until 25 July, Barbican, London).
* **Festivals** The Edinburgh International Film Festival (19-30 June) opens with Scottish social satire *Boyz in the Wood*. Other highlights include a retrospective of Spanish cinema and the UK premieres of Joanna Hogg's autobiographical tale of youthful romance *The Souvenir* and Agnès Varda's swansong *Varda by Agnès*. Meanwhile, the London Comedy Film Festival returns, after a year's hiatus, to BFI Southbank (11-14 July).
* **Event** The 'Woman with a Movie Camera Summit', a day of talks and events around women and cinema, including a discussion of female desire at the movies by *S&S* contributor Christina Newland, takes over the BFI Southbank on 22 June.

WHAT TO BUY

* **Early Women Filmmakers Collection** A four-disc Blu-ray box-set from the BFI, available from 24 June, highlights 14 of early cinema's most innovative and influential female directors, among them Mabel Normand, Alice Guy-Blaché and Lois Weber. Collected together are 22 films from 1911-40, plus documentaries on their makers and contextual essays that explore the tremendous and undervalued contributions these women made to cinema history.

WHAT TO READ

* **Picture** In 1950 Lillian Ross, a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, followed the production of John Huston's *The Red Badge of Courage* and its miserable fate – torn apart by MGM studio heads in post-production. Her account, one of Hollywood's best 'making of' tales, is back in print from New York Review of Books Classics, with a new foreword by the director's daughter, the actor Anjelica Huston.

WHAT TO STREAM

* **Too Old to Die Young** Nicolas Winding Refn's Los Angeles-set supernatural *noir* series, co-created with comic-book writer Ed Brubaker, is available on Amazon from 14 June.
* **Shaft** The reboot of this action thriller (envisaged as a sequel to John Singleton's 2000 film) receives a Netflix-only release outside the US on 28 June. The black-leather-clad crime-fighting family of Richard Roundtree and Samuel L. Jackson expands to a third generation with Jessie T. Usher playing young cyber-detective John Shaft Jr.
* **Claire Denis** Coinciding with the release of her new film *High Life*, Mubi delves into the French auteur's back catalogue, showing four of her films, including her 1999 exploration of male identity in crisis *Beau Travail*.

DEATH IN VENICE

On the eve of a new 4K release of *Don't Look Now*, DP Anthony Richmond remembers working alongside Roeg and Godard

By Trevor Johnston

It's a bit of a surprise to hear Anthony Richmond admit he was nervous before shooting *Don't Look Now* (1973). Among Britain's top tier of cameramen, he's always been a model of versatility, whether collaborating with Nicolas Roeg across three decades, braving the maelstrom of Jean-Luc Godard's *One + One* (1968), or shooting anything from shadowy horror (*Candyman*, 1992) to candy-coloured comedy (*Legally Blonde*, 2001). Back in 1972, however, making the step up to director of photography for his friend and industry mentor Roeg was a daunting prospect. Richmond had learned his craft as clapper loader and focus puller during Roeg's 1960s period as esteemed DP for David Lean, François Truffaut and John Schlesinger. Now was his chance to move on from that apprenticeship with this challenging psychological thriller set in wintry Venice. "He put me at ease because he trusted me," Richmond recalls. "The best thing he said was not to be afraid of the dark. Venice itself was a very brooding place in those days. With hardly any streetlights, you had to get the best from colour stock which wasn't that fast. Luckily, Nic let me run with it."

Based in Los Angeles since the 1980s, when he was married to *Charlie's Angels* star Jaclyn Smith, Richmond is today briefly back in his native London to finalise a new 4K print of *Don't Look Now*, rereleased in UK cinemas this July, prior to an Ultra HD Blu-ray release. "I'd seen a beautiful pristine print from the BFI at the American Cinematheque in LA not so long ago, so that was the benchmark," he explains. "We went back to basics to make the transfer look as much like film as possible. I'm amazed how well it's turned out."

Those reds, then, will remain as blood-curdling as ever. The images of the scarlet raincoat on Donald Sutherland's doomed young daughter in the traumatic opening – subsequently mirrored by the startling finale – are among the most memory-searing representations of colour in cinema history. Richmond, though, is happy to share the credit. "I tend to get the kudos for this stuff, but really it's a lot to do with the art and costume department," he admits. "We took out the reds from the rest of the film, so when you do see red, it has this subconscious impact. The winter light at the farm in England also brought a really eerie quality to the drowning scene, though it was emotionally tough to shoot. I'll always remember Nic telling the lovely little girl she had to pretend to be dead..."

Richmond, who went on to shoot four more titles with Roeg, including *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) and *Bad Timing* (1980), says that the director had a way of bringing the best out of his team. "You never quite knew what was coming next; it was as if he was testing you. He certainly enjoyed surprises, but when things went wrong he always saw some humour in it. It's why the 70s and 80s were a great time to be making films. Nowadays it's more like going to war. You just spend so much time arguing over money. The fun's gone out of it a bit."

Nicolas Roeg (left) and Anthony Richmond

Now in his 70s, with no plans to retire from the industry, Richmond tends to work only for directors who are friends, and is also faculty chair for cinematography at the New York Film Academy campus in LA. He's certainly uniquely

Venice was a very brooding place in those days. With hardly any streetlights, you had to get the best from colour stock

His dark materials: Anthony Richmond and Nicolas Roeg with Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie on the set of *Don't Look Now* in 1973

The film's use of red was spare but unforgettable

placed to reflect on the enormous span of technical development across the industry since the 1950s, when, as a teenager, he started out as a runner for Pathé News, looking after the newsreel camera gear on call to capture Britain's great state and sporting events. When American investment boosted UK film production during the 1960s, he was well placed to progress, and his CV is emblematic of the collision between pop music and film during the Swinging London era. It was Richmond, for instance, who captured The Beatles' impromptu final gig on a roof in Savile Row, enshrined in Michael Lindsay-Hogg's feature *Let It Be* (1970). Indeed, he's understandably upbeat about the recent news that Peter Jackson is at work on a documentary drawing on unseen (and essentially long-suppressed) footage shot for the project.

"They've scanned 52 hours of footage from the recording sessions which took place before The Beatles went up on the roof. Until now, it's only been myself, Michael and a couple of crew members who knew what was in there. That's because there was so much acrimony between Yoko Ono and Linda [McCartney], and a lot of tension between Lennon and [Paul] McCartney. George Harrison also got pissed off because no one was taking him seriously. And in the meantime, Ringo just kept playing his drums. It'll be fantastic to have it all out there at last."

Bear in mind that this was just one part of what Richmond terms his "rock 'n' roll year", which also involved the chaotic shoot for The Rolling Stones' 'Rock 'n' Roll Circus' show and footage with The Who eventually seen in *The Kids Are Alright* (1979). There's no doubt, though, who looms fondest in Richmond's memory. "I loved Godard," he beams. "When we shot The Stones doing 'Sympathy for the Devil' in the old cinema in Barnes, that was the first time any film had shown you the process of a top group in the studio. But the fun really started later, when we got into a car with Anne [Wiazemsky], his wife, and suddenly she's out on the streets, spraying the kerb, cars, restaurants. Real paint and no permissions. It was madness. But you know, at 24 years of age, I was so fucking proud to be standing there beside Godard with a handheld camera."

***Don't Look Now* screens at BFI Southbank, London, and select UK cinemas from 5 July**

ILLUSTRATION BY LUCINDA ROGERS

DREAM PALACES
THE FOX DRIVE-IN CINEMA, NAIROBI

Rafiki director Wanuri Kahiu recalls the magical thrill of a family visit to the drive-in as a young girl in Kenya in the early 1990s

One of my most vivid and special memories of the theatre was going to the Fox drive-in with my aunt and cousin. It was really old school. You would pull up to a pole with speakers attached, wind down the windows and put the speaker in your car so you could hear the film. Later on you could tune in on your radio. Then you'd just watch the movie in your car! You got to bring popcorn in, and it was one of the few occasions you could actually eat in the car. It was such a wondrous occasion.

The first time I went there we watched *Bambi* (1942), which felt magical, and I remember not wanting that moment to end: watching it through a windscreen, surrounded by people you love, eating in the car, doing things you couldn't normally do… I must've been young, maybe 10 or 11. It wasn't something you would do as an older teen, because then you didn't want to watch movies with your parents. It was really when we were still very much enamoured with being part of adult life, a peek into what it felt like.

The theatre showed a number of different films. I remember watching a couple of musicals there, because Bollywood films are big in Kenya. *Devdas* (2002) is one of my favourite musicals of all time. It's glorious. It's just such an extravagant film in many ways, and so heart-breaking.

There weren't many Kenyan films being made then. The first Kenyan feature I watched was *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1995). Before that, there were lots of documentaries, but there wasn't much narrative film. It's strange but it's not the films themselves that influenced me as far as becoming a filmmaker. It was the idea that I could create film that started the desire in me. I didn't truly know it was a possibility until I walked into a TV studio and someone was filming.

The drive-in was in a big field, and at the time it was on the outskirts of Nairobi. It opened in 1958 and was for white patrons only until independence from Britain in 1963, when cinemas were integrated. Cinema in Africa was used in many different ways under colonialism. I discovered that in Zimbabwe they wanted to encourage people to come and work in mines or other dangerous or remote places, so they would play cowboy films to get people to come and then try to exploit them.

The Fox drive-in is not there any more. It's being developed into a shopping mall and a multiplex, which is horrible. In Kenya it's really expensive to go to the cinema, so it's very much a middle- or upper-class experience. And the drive-in was too, as you had to have a car to go there. A cinema ticket can cost from five to ten dollars, which is a huge amount of money in a country where people are often paid less than $1 a day.

There were, and continue to be, community cinemas where people come in and show films on a mobile projector or on live TV. So there is an experience of cinema that is more accessible to all, in a different way. They also come with translators. There have been a couple of films I've seen where you'd have the film playing with a single man in front of the screen translating everything. And he would not only translate the dialogue, he'd translate the action! So he'd be like: "Then he hits him: *boof*! And then he hits him back: *boof, boof*!" He would do his own sound effects. People would start going to cinemas depending on who the translator was as well.

There is also censorship in Kenya. The Classification Board sees cinema as a way to promote traditional values, which I think is absurd, because we have internet. My film *Rafiki* was only allowed to be shown for seven days. *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) was banned. *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015) was banned. But *Fifty Shades Freed* (2018) wasn't banned. The head of the Classification Board told me the reason he didn't ban it was because they got married at the end!

Looking to the future, I hope theatres can be subsidised, so that more people can go. I think with developments like Netflix, it is becoming more accessible. I hope there are more spaces where there is communal watching because I think it is important – not only being alone in your house watching films, but in a group of people, reacting as a group to art.

Wanuri Kahiu was talking to Isabel Stevens. 'Rafiki' was reviewed in our last issue.

BFI Film Forever

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE
Sight&Sound

SUBSCRIBE FOR JUST £4.16 A MONTH*

Pay by Direct Debit and receive:

An annual print subscription for just £50
12 months access to the Digital Edition
Access to the complete 80-year archive
A free Blu-ray of *La Belle et la Bête*

International subscriptions also available

*Price based on an annual print subscription. Only 6 and 12 month Direct Debit subscriptions are available, exclusively to UK print subscribers. Print subscriptions start with the next available issue. Access to the Digital Edition and Archive will be available 24 hours after completion of purchase. Please allow up to 6 weeks for the complimentary Blu-ray to arrive after the order is placed.

Visit bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/subscribe
Call +44 (0)20 8955 7070

THE NUMBERS: WOMAN AT WAR

A quirky tale about an unlikely environmental activist has proved a small-scale hit for Picturehouse as it looks to boost its acquisition of titles

By Charles Gant

When Picturehouse Cinemas joint managing director Clare Binns saw *Woman at War* in Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival last year, she knew right away she wanted to distribute the film in the UK. It didn't matter that director Benedikt Erlingsson's only previous feature, *Of Horses and Men* (2013), had had only modest commercial success at UK cinemas (£41,000 for distributor Axiom) or that the new Icelandic drama lacked other marketable talent elements, such as familiar cast names.

"It just struck me, it's everything we like to do: it had a very strong female character of a certain age, it had a good story, it dealt with environmental issues, it dealt with other human issues, and it just made me feel good when I came out of the cinema," says Binns, who is head of acquisitions at distribution arm Picturehouse Entertainment. "I felt other people would have the same response."

It may be the case that more filmmakers are making stories centred on women aged over 50 – Sebastián Lelio's *Gloria* (2013) and US remake *Gloria Bell* (2018), for example – but this demographic remains underrepresented on screen, especially when you consider that audiences at most independent cinemas, including the Picturehouse chain, tend to skew older and, anecdotally at least, have a slightly higher proportion of women than men.

Woman at War tells the story of an unlikely-seeming environmental activist: a 50-year-old choir teacher who absolutely nobody suspects of being the eco-warrior waging war on an aluminium plant by repeatedly taking down the local power supply.

At the start of this year, Picturehouse clarified and firmed up its policy on theatrical windows, communicating that in future it would only show feature films that would remain exclusive to cinemas for 16 weeks. In effect, this meant Picturehouse would no longer be showing Curzon Artificial Eye titles, since these appear simultaneously on Curzon Home Cinema, or films from any other distributor that are made available on digital platforms within the 16-week window.

The result is that Picturehouse Entertainment is now looking to acquire more films to play in its cinemas that might in the past have come from such distributors, although Binns plays down talk of a major strategy shift. "We are upping our game in terms of the amount of titles we are buying," she says, "but it's not changed the kind of films we buy. We'll continue to buy small films and big films and medium films and documentaries and foreign-language. We are just continuing to do what we always do."

Power struggle: *Woman at War*

Industry attention was caught when Picturehouse Entertainment and Curzon Artificial Eye ended up releasing films on the same date in late March (Carol Morley's *Out of Blue* and Julian Schnabel's *At Eternity's Gate*, respectively) and did the same thing five weeks later in early May (*Women at War* and Brady Corbet's *Vox Lux*). These distribution clashes would surely not be happening if Picturehouse's cinemas were playing Curzon titles.

"We are picking the best release dates for our films," says Binns. "And that is increasingly difficult, because there's so many films every week. You are always up against somebody or something. But there's certainly no deliberate policy to do anything other than find the best date for our films."

While Picturehouse's *Out of Blue* signally failed to match the box office of *At Eternity's Gate*, the same cannot be said for the Picturehouse release this time around. Despite *Vox Lux* having seeming advantages such as being in the English language and cast names including Natalie Portman and Jude Law, it had clocked up just £117,000 in the UK after four weeks. *Woman at War*, having debuted with a solid £57,000 from 34 cinemas (and £68,000 including previews), had reached an impressive £280,000 by the same date – 4.9 times the opening number.

Picturehouse's strategy? "We screened it a lot in advance," says Binns. "We did lots of previews and members' previews. Some films you want to keep the anticipation, so that people get very excited that they can't see it. With this one, we knew that we had to get people talking about it. When people see it, they love it."

ACTIVIST DRAMAS AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Erin Brockovich (Steven Soderbergh)	2000	£10.6m
Suffragette (Sarah Gavron)	2015	£10.1m
Pride (Matthew Warchus)	2014	£4.10m
Milk (Gus Van Sant)	2009	£1.47m
The Edukators (Hans Weingartner)	2005	£288,000
Woman at War (Benedikt Erlingsson)	2019	£280,000*
Bread and Roses (Ken Loach)	2001	£224,000
120 BPM (Robin Campillo)	2018	£202,000
The East (Zal Batmanglij)	2013	£166,000
Night Moves (Kelly Reichardt)	2014	£68,000

*gross to May 27

IN PRODUCTION

*** The post-*Bohemian Rhapsody* musician biopic craze continues with the news that Baz Luhrmann is directing a portrait of Elvis. He's now on the hunt to find a king of rock 'n' roll to star alongside Tom Hanks as Elvis's famously controlling manager Colonel Tom Parker.**

*** After two series of *Top of the Lake*, it looked like Jane Campion (right) was wedded to prestige TV, but the good news is that her next project will be cinema-bound. *The Power of the Dog* is an adaptation of Thomas Savage's 1967 novel, a psychological drama which examines masculinity from the perspective of a homophobic, but closeted, rancher in 1920s Montana. Elisabeth Moss and Benedict Cumberbatch are set to star.**

*** Guillermo del Toro is adapting William Lindsay Gresham's chilling tale of carnival life *Nightmare Alley* and *S&S* contributor Kim Morgan has co-written the script with him. Dusting off his con-man patter from *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Leonardo DiCaprio will star as the crooked antihero played by Tyrone Power in the 1947 adaptation.**

*** Welsh-Egyptian director Sally El Hosaini. is following up her auspicious 2012 debut *My Brother the Devil* with *The Swimmers*, a Working Title-produced biopic of Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini, the teenage Olympian refugee who dragged a dinghy of refugees to safety across the Aegean Sea.**

PROFILE

THE EXPLOITS OF STEPHANIE

Stephanie Rothman made exploitation movies with a twist – they showed independent women grappling with the modern world

By Anne Morra

Why doesn't the filmgoing public know director Stephanie Rothman's name? She directed seven feature films between 1966 and 1974, worked for well-known producer Roger Corman and his New World Pictures, and her films, now classed as genre works, thanks to their sometimes sensational, pulp-driven narratives, made money for their producers and distributors. They were lurid, geared towards the drive-in gang and easily digested. Along with these seemingly desirable attributes – desirable as far as a bottom line-conscious producer is concerned – Rothman's films include beautiful young women in snug white nurse's uniforms. The optics of exploitation were swiftly countered by female characters who could thrash an out-of-control male and also best him intellectually.

Rothman's films were as popular with their intended audiences as any made by her rookie peers, such as Martin Scorsese or Francis Ford Coppola. In *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (2004), Pam Cook remarks, "This raises the interesting question of whether exploitation filmmaking does in fact operate a successful 'training ground' for women, as it does for male directors." This question is now being further examined by a new posse of writers, curators and scholars, asking what were the factors that might have scuttled Rothman's professional ascent into the Hollywood big time?

Rothman was born in 1936 in Patterson, New Jersey; her family moved to California in 1945. She studied film at the University of Southern California (USC) and was the first female recipient of the Director's Guild of America (DGA) fellowship. An early cinephile, Rothman was awakened to the power of the movies by seeing Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). Her nascent cinematic passion brought her to American International Pictures where she was hired by Roger Corman. Intelligent, a keen socio-cultural observer, professionally trained and disciplined, Rothman was a perfect candidate for the B-movie field, with its fast production schedules, modest budgets and scripts written on the fly. Given her outstanding professional qualities, her gender was irrelevant, particularly to Corman, who was singularly concerned with saving money to make money on his films.

Rothman's first solo directorial effort was *It's a Bikini World* (1967), which she co-wrote with her husband Charles Swartz. It's a full-on beach-blanket movie with ubiquitous surfboards, girls in skimpy bathing suits and leering young men, but the ever nonconformist Rothman pulls a clever switch. Delilah rejects Mike because he's a bonehead; Mike is so smitten that he concocts an imaginary twin brother Herbert and poses as an intellectual just so he can be near her. Delilah and Mike go toe to toe in a series of physical contests at the beach and she wins each time. In the end, a defeated Mike must figure out a way to tell Delilah that he is also Herbert the brainiac. Will she accept him, or reject him again? *It's a Bikini World* has a message, about a woman who wants more in a partner, that was at odds with the genre's usual upbeat, syrupy summer-fling concept. In 2017 Rothman noted in an interview, "When reviewers saw my films they would remark on the strong vein of feminism in them."

With one solo directing credit, Rothman knew she wanted to move on to the mainstream of filmmaking. The studios were eagerly interested in the new crop of film school graduates, but for some reason she was excluded from those career opportunities. In an interview with Jane Collins, reprinted in Maya Montañez Smukler's *Liberating Hollywood: Women Directors and*

Intelligent, a keen socio-cultural observer, professionally trained and disciplined, Rothman was perfect for the B-movie field

Angels in America: *The Student Nurses* (1970)

the Feminist Reform of 1970s American Cinema (2018), Rothman says, "Nobody I knew was hiring women, and the few times I inquired I was told, they don't hire women." Corman, now running New World Pictures, stepped back into Rothman's professional life, making her and Swartz an appealing proposal. Though working for Corman was not what she wanted or felt she deserved, her last experience with him had not been bad in itself; without any other concrete prospects, Rothman knew she could count on Corman to be hands-off as long as she stayed on budget and adhered to his requirements for nudity and violence.

The Student Nurses (1970) was envisioned as an erotic pot-boiler. Corman undoubtedly understood what his devoted ticket buyers wanted and was determined to deliver the goods. Rothman, Swartz and screenwriter Don Spencer crafted a story about four female friends dedicated to their medical careers, social consciousness and romance. In the first few minutes of the film, one of the characters fights off a would-be rapist; later, another deals with an illegal abortion. In his review at the time for the *Chicago Reader*, the critic Dave Kehr wrote, "Actually, the only condescension director Stephanie Rothman makes to the [exploitation] genre is to have her actors take off their clothes once in a while; the rest is a surprisingly sensitive study of youthful aspirations and conflicting interests among three [sic] female friends."

Rothman was incapable of making a film with a dishonest message; and not knowing if she'd have another chance at directing, she was intent on packing *The Student Nurses* with genuine societal commentary and self- reliant female characters. The nurses confront many forms of social injustice: abortion is illegal, the Vietnam War rages on and local Mexican-Americans are protesting in their communities for safer streets. While *The Student Nurses* privileges female agency, Rothman plays it fair and also extends equal positive treatment to what would today be called 'woke' men. The film went on to earn more than $1 million at the box office, drawing a substantial profit for New World Pictures; Corman urged Rothman to make a *Nurses* sequel, but she declined.

After their next title, *The Velvet Vampire* (1971), Rothman and Swartz left New World to found their own company, Dimension Pictures, with Lawrence Woolner. In 1972 they released *Group Marriage* followed by *Terminal Island* (1973) and *The Working Girls* (1974), all directed by Rothman. Like *The Student Nurses*, these films discussed weighty issues such as reproductive rights, reform of penal laws, gender equality and a modern conception of marriage. Rothman, untethered from Corman, stayed true to her preoccupation with narratives of capable, individualistic women and a changing society within films that offered nudity and violence.

On the surface, *Group Marriage* might pass as a typical 1970's exploitation film; however, when a California-based heterosexual twosome expands to a foursome and eventually a sextet of lovers who experience genuine romance, the boundaries of traditional monogamy are tested radically. The female characters in *Group Marriage* are entirely in control of their lives, of who they will and will not love, and they eschew societal judgements. Chris, Jan and Elaine do not require a man – or three – to approve their livelihoods and sexual activities or raise their children. The community outside this group, in a time of socio-political change, struggles to comprehend their curious relationship, but within this amorous knot there is nothing disingenuous about their tender connections.

You can't handle the tooth: *The Velvet Vampire* (1971), Rothman's last film for Roger Corman

Her next film *Terminal Island* is a raging indictment of contemporary penal practices set on a fictional island where murderers, male and female, are sent and forgotten about. *The Working Girls*, the only screenplay Rothman wrote solo, is set in Los Angeles and tackles prickly themes of equal employment as well as limitations women experience when seeking work. Riffing on what is the expected profession of the term 'working girl', Rothman explores various workplaces and conceives characters instilled with ambition, humour, self-respect and independence, all framed by the women's movement of the 1970s.

Invisible woman: Stephanie Rothman

Today, aged 82, Rothman still believes that the film industry in the 1970s was not ready for an independent woman director – like the rest of society at the time, it was grappling with innumerable bewildering new paradigms for thinking about women and their roles. The rise of the National Organization for Women (NOW), support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and the call for legalised abortion, among other radical stances, polarised the sexes, distanced politicians and shocked and rebuffed the 'establishment'. As far as Rothman was concerned, the establishment was Hollywood film industry executives. In a 2017 article in *Camera Obscura*, the film scholar Alicia Kozma noted: "Film history has failed to remember Rothman and her work behind the camera. Her cinematic presence is reduced to parenthetical mentions, footnotes, and anecdotal asides, in large part due to Rothman's incongruous status as a woman working in an industry traditionally populated by and produced for men: exploitation film."

Had Rothman worked in the mainstream studio system it is unlikely she would have been given the autonomy to explore the controversial matters that permeated her films. At a time when #MeToo and #TimesUp narratives flood the media, how is it that Rothman's journey – from a productive genre director to exiting the film industry in the mid-1970s to launch a successful commercial real-estate career – could have gone unreported for so long? Her biography alone could furnish the plot for a biopic. As far back as 1976, in an article in *Film Comment*, Terry Curtis Fox wrote, "Stephanie Rothman might as well not exist. Because Rothman has done all her work in what remains a poverty row... making horror-sexploiters which never reach beyond the drive-ins and grinds – Stephanie Rothman is invisible. Everywhere but on the screen." While it was the exploitation genre that provided Rothman with a well-deserved entrée to the film industry, it was the same construct that held back her progress, in what Kozma calls "a cruel twist". Now, though, Rothman's films and her career are hardly going unnoticed by a fresh assembly of scholars and critics.

6–21 July
HOME

DAVID LYNCH AT HOME

Art, film, music and more

Commissioned and produced by Manchester International Festival and HOME, Manchester, in association with the David Lynch Foundation UK. Photo: Josh Telles

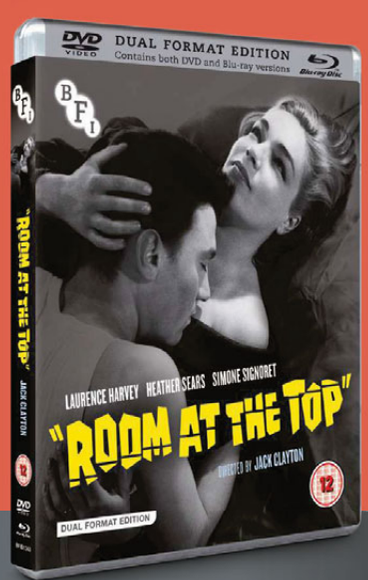
MIF Manchester International Festival 2019
MIF Manchester International Festival 2019
MIF Manchester International Festival 2019
MIF Manchester International Festival 2019
MIF Manchester International Festival 2019

4 – 21 July mif.co.uk

bruntwood · MAG Manchester Airport · NCP · Manchester City Council · BBC · The Guardian · Manchester Evening News · Arts Council England

BFI Film Forever

"ROOM AT THE TOP"



'A FILM THAT GENUINELY CHANGED BRITISH CINEMA FOREVER'
THE GUARDIAN

JACK CLAYTON'S LANDMARK CLASSIC
60TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

NEW 2K RESTORATION
AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY / DVD AND ONLINE

Buy on iTunes Store · BFI PLAYER · BFI SHOP

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

Before he directed Garbo in her great roles, Clarence Brown was making tender, thrilling dramas, as a new restoration demonstrates

By Pamela Hutchinson

On a remote stretch of American railroad, a hard-working signal operator and his family are terrorised by a snarling villain. While his pretty young wife defends her virtue against the intruder's threats, our hero engages in a thrilling race to the rescue to save a runaway train. It could easily be the plot of one of D.W. Griffith's early short melodramas, but this is Clarence Brown's *The Signal Tower*, a fully fledged feature film from 1924, adapted from a short story by Wadsworth Camp.

At this year's San Francisco Silent Film Festival, a triumphant screening of the new restoration of *The Signal Tower* – a collaboration between Kevin Brownlow's Photoplay Productions and the festival itself – confirmed the enduring if undersung brilliance of Brown. According to his biographer Gwenda Young, this is the first of Brown's more personal films, something evident in its emotional tenderness but also in the appearance of some of his favourite themes: hard-working folk and magnificent trains nestled among grand rural landscapes. While the film builds to a classically thrilling finish, which was enhanced on this occasion by the expert and well-paced accompaniment of the pianist Stephen Horne and the percussionist Frank Bockius, it was the more intimate scenes that marked this out as a special silent. Brown accumulates small, often domestic details to convey the tensions in relationships: the way the cad eyes up his prey when he clocks her laddered stockings and scuffed heels, the misunderstandings between husband and wife that lead to danger, the irrepressible enthusiasm of the child whose interference will prove decisive. And, neatly, in the simply illustrated intertitles, the signal of the title raises to alert the audience to the growing peril.

Brown is long overdue a critical reappraisal, for his silent-era achievements such as *The Goose Woman* (1925), *Smouldering Fires* (1925) and *Flesh and the Devil* (1927) alone, not to mention a string of first-rate talkies featuring Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo, or the highly beloved *National Velvet* (1944), which starred a young Elizabeth Taylor. One reason for his relative lack of present-day acclaim is that he was often eclipsed by his stars. That's a fate *The Signal Tower* neatly avoids since among its cast only Wallace Beery, the Mack Sennett alumnus who became a love-to-hate villain, remains a well-known name outside silent circles.

The film is primarily a showcase for Virginia Valli, as a wary wife trying to protect her family from an initially ambiguous danger

This was a prestige release from Universal, though, classified as a 'Super-Jewel' production and it is strongly cast, with the signalman and his wife, Dave and Sally Taylor, ably performed by 1920s stars Rockliffe Fellowes and Virginia Valli. A six-year-old Frankie Darro plays their boy, Sonny – he would go on to a successful career as an adult actor, and later a stuntman, though he is unrecognisable in one of his most famous roles, as Robby the Robot in *Forbidden Planet* (1956). And comic star Dot Farley has a significant role too, as Sally's misguidedly flirtatious Cousin Gertie.

Beery plays the dastardly Joe Standish, the interloper who arrives at the signal tower deep in the redwood forests of northern California to share duties with Dave and causes havoc in the happy home. He is clearly a shifty type, with slicked hair and shiny shoes (reportedly, Beery was pretty vile on set too, a cantankerous presence visibly contemptuous of his peers). Dazzled by his glamour, though, poor Gertie makes a play for Joe's affections, leading to some uncomfortably queasy moments as she hamfistedly attempts to seduce a man who is clearly a sexual predator. Joe, however, is determined to break up the Taylors' marriage. Fellowes – who made his debut in Raoul Walsh's superb crime drama *Regeneration* (1915) – is a likeable hero, but the film is primarily a showcase for Valli, especially in one unforgettable close-up. Her character could have been nothing more than a sketched-in type, but as a wary wife trying to protect her family from an initially ambiguous danger, Valli carries the emotional weight of the film, especially the first half. Valli is best known now, perhaps, for her role in Hitchcock's *The Pleasure Garden* (1925), but she was one of Universal's leading stars in the 1920s, and there's a hint here of how Brown would later coax distinguished performances from Garbo, Crawford et al. Director and star would remain friends for decades afterward. Brown started out as an engineer, and his love for the mechanics of the railroad holds the picture together; he also appears on screen, briefly, as a switchman.

The film premiered in London, not the US, but received positive reviews in the American press. Pointedly, the *Variety* critic wrote: "The author has made romance out of the somewhat sombre lives of what, in England, is somewhat snobbishly called 'the working class'. An English producer would be almost shocked if asked to find romance in the life of a traction engine driver. He can only find beauty or heroism in the higher ranks of life."

This new 4K tinted restoration brings that romance rushing back to the screen. Since no 35mm print of *The Signal Tower* is known to survive, the restorers relied on a Universal Show-at-Home 16mm copy and a preservation duplicate from the Packard Humanities Institute. The first print was bequeathed to Brownlow by Eric Sparks, a private collector in Sussex, whose twin passions were silent cinema and trains – and who could not be persuaded to part with it in his lifetime. Sparks considered it the best silent railroad picture in his collection, and now the world can see why.

Warning signs: scenes from Clarence Brown's *The Signal Tower*

ILLUSTRATION BY MICK BROWNFIELD WWW.MICKBROWNFIELD.COM

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

An evening at London's Film Society in 1934 was a showcase for radical experiments, and for a film culture that valued radicalism

By Henry K. Miller

In the late 1920s there was a real belief that film could be a vehicle for aesthetic and political radicalism – that, as Annette Michelson wrote in 1966, "the revolutionary aspirations of the modernist movement in literature and the arts, on the one hand, and of a Marxist or Utopian tradition, on the other, could converge in the hopes and promises, as yet undefined, of the new medium". In London the site of this possible convergence was the Film Society, founded in 1925, which arranged private monthly screenings of films that no distributor would carry and no censor would permit – most sensationally the films coming out of the Soviet Union, such as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).

The radical hopes faded fast. *Potemkin* appeared in London within weeks of the Wall Street Crash of 1929; the resulting Depression would help spread Nazism and fascism across central and southern Europe. In Michelson's telling, the fusion of revolutionary politics and form found in the Soviet films was already being dissolved by the "counterrevolution of Stalinism" (all having been rosy in the USSR until then). Meanwhile, the introduction of synchronised sound made avant-garde production more difficult than ever, in part because it seemed to portend a return to realism. Some Soviet directors argued that sound and image should not coincide.

In the British context the realist resurgence was to be blamed on the director whose first film, *Drifters*, had debuted in the same programme as *Battleship Potemkin*: John Grierson, godfather of the documentary film movement. Paul Willemen, writing in 1980, thought that Grierson's nefarious scheme was "to integrate, use and thus defuse the considerable oppositional energy that had fuelled independent cinema" around the Film Society of the 1920s.

The Film Society itself went through a change of personnel at the turn of the decade. One of its original organisers, Iris Barry, went to New York, eventually becoming founding curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, while chairman Ivor Montagu went with Eisenstein to Hollywood. Grierson joined the society's governing council in 1931. In these years the Film Society was put under pressure as new commercial art cinemas came into being, snapping up some of the films that would once have been its exclusive domain, but it never lost its edge. The 74th programme, staged on 25 November 1934 at the massive Tivoli Palace on the Strand, is a case in point.

It consisted of eight films – all new, all fascinating. First on the bill was *Beyond This Open Road*, an experimental short by B. Vivian Braun and Irene Nicholson, editors of the little magazine *Film Art* and programmers at the Forum art cinema under Charing Cross. Nicholson was one of the hold-outs against the talkie, a position she justified in a series of articles in the feminist magazine *Time and Tide* around this time. The film was accompanied with live 'non-synchronous music' by Jack Ellitt, a regular collaborator of Len Lye's. Also in the programme were an abstract film and a cigarette advertisement by Oskar Fischinger.

Rebels without a cause: Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* (1933)

Other films reflected the close relationship between the Film Society's inner circle, particularly Thorold Dickinson, and Lotte Reiniger, who had more films shown there than any other single filmmaker. As well as her own silhouette film *Das rollende Rad* (1933), the 74th programme included a groundbreaking new animation by Claire Parker and Alexandre Alexeieff, friends of Reiniger's collaborator Berthold Bartosch. *Night on the Bare Mountain*, after the Mussorgsky composition, was made using a 'pin screen' of its makers' invention, consisting of 500,000 pins that were manipulated and lit, shot by shot, to produce images akin to engravings. "What news of Lotte Reiniger?", wrote Parker from Paris after the screening. "She was a dear to take so much interest in our film. Did she like it when she saw it or not?"

The Film Society was put under pressure as new commercial art cinemas came into being, but it never lost its edge

The item best-known today was the most contentious. The Film Society got its films haphazardly. Its council often viewed them in a bonded warehouse in Endell Street, Covent Garden, to avoid paying duty. It was there that Jean Vigo's anarchistic *Zéro de conduite* (1933), banned in France the previous year, was first shown in England, in March 1934, to an audience of two – Josephine Harvey, the Film Society's secretary, and Jacob Isaacs, a council member. Neither liked it; but Grierson saw it in Paris that August, and it was on his recommendation that it was brought back to Endell Street in September and at last approved. By the time of the 74th programme Vigo had died. His last film, *L'Atalante*, was mutilated by its distributor; ironically, the main source of the currently available 'restored' version is the less tampered-with print that Grierson, supposed hammer of the avant garde, brought to the Film Society the next year.

FS74, a reconstruction by Tashi Petter and Henry K. Miller, will be staged at the Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, London, on 15 June

Lotte Reiniger's *Das rollende Rad*

Parker and Alexeieff's *Night on the Bare Mountain*

FROM THE FILMMAKERS OF
CATCH ME DADDY, NEON BULL, RAW AND **A BEAUTIFUL BOY**

INTRODUCING
VICKY KNIGHT

A FILM BY **SACHA POLAK**

DIRTY GOD

★★★★
"A DEEPLY MOVING AND POWERFUL ALLEGORY... A BREATHTAKING FILM"
THE UPCOMING

★★★★
CINEMAGAZINE

"NEWCOMER VICKY KNIGHT IS MAGNETIC"
EMPIRE

"A GIANT MOVE FORWARD IN TERMS OF REPRESENTATION"
SCREEN

"REMARKABLE... IMMENSELY TOUCHING"
OC MOVIE REVIEWS

"STAND-OUT"
VARIETY

"FEARLESS"
HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

IN CINEMAS **JUNE 7**

© VIKING FILM / UMET1 / A PRIVATE VIEW / SAVAGE PRODUCTIONS / THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE / BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION 2019

GRAVE SITUATION

Jim Jarmusch's thoroughly enjoyable zombie movie 'The Dead Don't Die' has a lot of fun playing with genre conventions without ever losing sight of its deadly serious theme of environmental destruction, balancing melancholy and humour as in all his best films

By Geoff Andrew

When it was announced that the Cannes Film Festival would open with Jim Jarmusch's *The Dead Don't Die*, a few eyebrows were raised. Why would this august advocate of art cinema kick off with a zombie movie? And why was Jarmusch, arguably the most staunchly independent of a generation of American indie filmmakers, making a chiller about ghouls? He hadn't got where he is today by going down the mainstream route.

Those expressing surprise at Cannes' opening-night movie need not have worried. Not only has Jarmusch been ringing the changes on popular genres to very imaginative effect for many years, but the undead conceit is right up his street. After all, *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) had turned out to be very far from a conventional vampire movie; a highly personal meditation on the state of the world, with reflections on creativity, art, love, friendship and sustainability, it was short on gore and suspense, long on wit, wisdom and warmth. Moreover, that had not been Jarmusch's first film to deal with the notion of the walking dead.

What transpired to be something of an enduring preoccupation first manifested itself in *Dead Man* (1995), a western unlike any other which explored native American ideas about life and death as a continuing odyssey. Next came *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999), with the titular hitman characterised as a kind of angel of death who – like the similarly employed protagonist of *The Limits of Control* (2008) – might as well be dead himself: the former, particularly, abides by a code written in the *Hagakure*, the 18th-century Japanese guide to samurai philosophy and lore, which advises that, "Every day without fail, one should consider himself as dead." Mortality turned up unexpectedly in many Jarmusch movies: the brief but touching cemetery scene in *Broken Flowers* (2005), or the final vignette of *Coffee and Cigarettes* (2003), in which two veterans of the New York underground revel in the beauty of Janet Baker singing Mahler's '*Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*'.

APOCALYPSE NOW
Bill Murray, Chloë Sevigny and Adam Driver (below) play a trio of small-town cops facing an infestation of zombies, including one played by Iggy Pop (below, opposite), in Jim Jarmusch's *The Dead Don't Die*

Indeed, it might be death – along with many other seemingly inevitable concomitants of life – which provokes the Roberto Benigni character in *Down by Law* (1986) to repeatedly opine, in what might be emblematic of Jarmusch's take on human existence, that it's "a sad and beautiful world". It's no accident that the first shot of that film – which, like the earlier *Stranger than Paradise* (1984), was to some degree about unengaged characters being offered a chance of regeneration – centres on a hearse.

In other words, in Jarmusch's world, *media vita in morte sumus*: in the midst of life we are in death. Still, to quote again from the *Hagakure* as read by the latter-day samurai: "Matters of great concern should be treated lightly. And matters of small concern should be treated seriously." Hence *The Dead Don't Die*, a zombie movie that has – and provides – a lot of fun playing with genre conventions and clichés while reminding us that things may well end badly, as Ronnie, one of the film's three none-too-supercops, repeatedly muses. The familiar small-town-under-siege storyline is inspired especially by George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978); in Centerville – "A Real Nice Place" as it bills itself – odd things occur which suggest the earth may have tilted off its axis; then the dead begin rising from their graves. They're hungry, and neither the townships's citizens nor Ronnie, Mindy and Cliff, the officers authorised to defend them, have much of a clue what to do...

Playful, packed with movie allusions and in-jokes, but at the same time utterly relevant and serious in its theme, the film is beautifully shot by regular collaborator Frederick Elmes and boasts a cast to die for (sorry!), including Bill Murray, Adam Driver, Chloë Sevigny, Tilda Swinton, Danny Glover, Steve Buscemi, Tom Waits and a host of other faces, some familiar from the director's previous films, others upcoming younger actors new to his filmic universe. In short, it's a Jarmusch movie through and through. The interview that follows took place in Cannes the day after its world premiere at the festival's opening ceremony; Jarmusch was, by his own admission, exhausted, but in typically talkative, good-humoured mood.

Geoff Andrew: Can you explain the film's genesis?

Jim Jarmusch: Initially, I wanted to make a ridiculous, stupid film with actors I love, and some others I'd not yet worked with. I wanted zombies so I could have groups of people sequestered in different spaces; the zombies could attack then recede, like in *Night of the Living Dead*, and between attacks there'd be ridiculous dialogue about anything I wanted to put in. But all that remains from that initial idea are the zombies and the cast. When I wrote the script, in the spring of 2017, it became something else.

I took 'Centerville – A Real Nice Place' from Frank Zappa's '200 Motels', and thought about this small town with just three cops. Then I started devising characters for the actors I was writing for. For example, I asked Tilda, "What character would you like to be as a foreigner in a small American town?" and she immediately replied, "A Scottish mortician!" I said, "You got it!" I wrote for Tilda, Bill, Chloë, Adam, Steve – an old friend and one of the sweetest, least racist people I know, so I had him play a bad guy. The other characters came later, and I cast all those people – Selena Gomez, Austin Butler, Luka Sabbat – simply because I admired and liked them.

When I get depressed by human behaviour, my way of lifting myself is to remember that life on this planet is a very small thing, a spark in the time-scheme of the universe

GA: When did environmental catastrophe come into the story?

JJ: Well, my postmodern-zombie-movie inspiration was George Romero because he was obviously the master in that field. Before Romero, movie zombies were monstrous entities you could control, or victims you could control like the girl in *White Zombie* [1932]. But in *Night of the Living Dead* and Romero's other films, his zombies, while victims, were not controllable. Also, they're not monsters; they are *us*! And a metaphor for a collapsing social system. From *Dawn of the Dead*, where the zombies head for the shopping mall, we took the idea that they are still interested in that vestigial memory of something they liked. But they're very limited in their focus because they no longer have identities – that's important.

In *Night of the Living Dead*, someone theorises that the zombies are reactivated by something humans brought back from space: a virus or whatever. In any case, the reactivation happens because of some stupid act perpetrated by humans. For us, fracking was that ridiculous thing; it poisons our water, and there are lies told to us about it relieving our dependence on foreign energy.

Also, I've been kind of obsessed for some years about what might happen if the earth slipped off its axis. It's been tipping very slightly for some time, but what if there is a jump in that? We'd be totally screwed. The earth is so fragile; life is so fragile. I didn't want to make a totally bleak film, but I was trying to say the ecosystem is interconnected. What humans do affects the planet in so many ways, and we're fucking it up.

GA: Indeed. In my many previous years in Cannes, I was always struck by the masses of screaming swifts. This year, there are very few. That's not good.

JJ: I know. I haven't seen or heard a whippoorwill for maybe 13 years. Now it's the amphibians being affected; and when you drive on the highway there are no longer insects on your windscreen. No insects, no food, no ecosystem, no us. This morning I heard on the radio it was 85 degrees Fahrenheit [29C] up towards the Arctic; that's scary.

That said, I wasn't trying to make a negative film. I still have great hope in the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion. And especially in young people. That's why some of our characters do at least survive the end

THE HEAT IS ON
Despite the omnipresence of death in *The Dead Don't Die*, Jim Jarmusch (below) says he wasn't trying to make a negative film, deliberately offering some measure of hope by the film's close

PHOTOGRAPHY: ABBOT GENSER/FOCUS FEATURES

of the film; and why I made those characters outsiders somehow separated from society.

It's funny: today I've been reading stuff about the film saying that the notion it could 'all end badly' is a response to Trump. It's not. I wasn't thinking about Trump; he's a front-man. That said, the hat Steve wears with the slogan 'Keep America White Again' – which isn't even grammatically correct – is an intentionally blatant allusion, specifically to the stupid American racism perpetuated by white supremacists like Trump.

GA: I was intrigued when one character says, "The world is perfect; appreciate the details." That's not so different a sentiment from the one expressed by Benigni in *Down by Law*.

JJ: Yes, it's an almost Buddhist thing. When I get depressed and disappointed by human behaviour, my way of lifting myself is to remember that life on this planet is a very small thing, a spark in the time-scheme of the universe; even the earth's presence may just be a blip. Given that, we should really make an effort to appreciate the different species of birds, animals and plants, and be conscious of all the things we do together which make life beautiful. To appreciate that is very important. We ignore those things at our peril.

GA: It seemed you wanted to make some very serious points, but do so lightly – echoing the *Hagakure*.

JJ: I do think of the film primarily as a comedy, despite the darkness. The plan for me, Fred Elmes and production designer Alex DiGerlando, was for the film to be three things. We wanted it to be ridiculous in its humour; be dark in its undercurrents; and, hopefully, be cinematically beautiful in some way. But not fatalistic. Even Ronnie, who keeps saying he thinks things will end badly, is not a fatalist but – given the evidence – a realist.

GA: When Mindy asks Cliff to reassure her everything will be OK, that this bad dream will end, isn't that a reflection of how people resort to escapism rather than face worrying realities?

JJ: Right. We may now have 11 or 12 years to prevent a rise in temperature above 1.5 degrees centigrade, which will mean massive trouble for humans and other species... So come on, we *have* that much time! But apart from a few young people, the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion, I don't see anyone in power doing much about it. I just don't understand why people don't want to do anything. Don't they have children? Don't they care? I know there are people out there profiting from our consumerism, so that they'll have more money and power. But what are they going to do with that? It's perplexing to me.

GA: I see a continuity in your films that deals with the relationship between life and death; the notion that death is always with us. Do you feel that thread exists in your work?

JJ: I guess so, now you mention it, but I'm not analytical about my work; I'm intuitive in what I do. I don't disagree with what you say, but what I'm more conscious of is a seemingly contradictory balancing of melancholy and humour. They're both there in all my films, I think. The melancholy comes from recognising the sad things in our world; then there's the humour, which is very important for human beings. I used to ask myself: "What are the greatest things humans can offer?" I'd say, art, including music; science; and things which combine art and science, like architecture and engineering. Now I've added jokes to that list. Art, science, humour: all products of the imagination.

THE DEAD ZONE (Clockwise from top left) Tom Waits as Hermit Bob, Tilda Swinton as Zelda Winston, Luka Sabbat as Zach with Selena Gomez's Zoe and Austin Butler's Jack, and Steve Buscemi as Farmer Miller, in *The Dead Don't Die*

GA: Speaking of humour, I love the zombies, because they're pleasingly old-fashioned, especially the first pair who appear, played by Iggy Pop and Sara Driver.

JJ: I really didn't want to make a splatter film, even though as humans we're full of fluid. So I wanted the zombies to be desiccated, full of dust. The ones played by Sara and Iggy were our 'hero zombies'. I've long thought Sara and Iggy would work well together in a film as a couple, so I suggested they play the first zombies we see. Iggy said, "OK, but if we do it, I'd like to know what had happened to our characters?" So I said, "In 1973 the two of you were returning from a Blue Oyster Cult concert, and died in a car or motorcycle accident." He said, "Motorcycle? Cool!" Sara was fine with that. So we went with that era; our costume designer copied her character's look from a late 1960s picture of Anita Pallenberg.

GA: The three youngsters who turn up in Centerville feel reminiscent of the characters who used to get killed in 1970s horror films like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* [1974].

JJ: Yes; the beautiful young people who in those movies were usually punished for having sex. But I also put them into our film because for the folks in Centerville they would appear very exotic – it's why they're referred to as urban hipsters. Young people on the road, cool car, ethnically mixed, good-looking... they're different. Like Zelda the Scottish mortician, who's such an outsider in that community that she's not really understood.

GA: Finally, to take this light-hearted, stupid zombie movie a little seriously: Cliff and Ronnie at one point agree that even if things might end badly, they should absolutely give of their best. Is that your advice to humanity?

JJ: I suppose you could take it that way, though we don't know for sure that things will end badly. Actually, it's a cinematic cliché: that macho, buddy warrior thing, when the guys get out of the car, kick the doors closed, and move into action. It's the only time we use drums in our score, and slow-motion. I guess it's my Michael Bay moment.

***The Dead Don't Die* is released in UK cinemas on 12 July and will be reviewed in our next issue**

CANNES

PULP FICTIONS

With Bong Joonho's darkly comic satire *Parasite* picking up the Palme d'Or and a marauding horde of zombies, crime thrillers, sci-fi films and quasi westerns following up the rear, this year's festival saw a culture shift toward genre cinema – and a simultaneous boost in the quality and range of films on offer. **By Nick James**

During this year's Cannes I heard no mention of the Netflix ban: that's how enjoyable a celebration of cinema it was. So when, at the end, Netflix bought the distribution rights to Mati Diop's lustrous political melodrama *Atlantics*, which won the Grand Prix, there was more than a whiff of irony about it – one-nil to Cannes, after last year losing the Netflix-funded *Roma* to Venice. Diop is the first black female director to be in Competition at the festival, and her debut feature *Atlantics* was a worthy winner of the second prize. Her film matched Jim Jarmusch's opener *The Dead Don't Die* in offering us a version of zombies. Who would think that the undead could dominate Cannes? Only those in a sleepless daze who had lasted the full 12 days of the festival.

With Bertrand Bonello's stunning *Zombi Child* in the Directors' Fortnight strand adding more dazzle, the undead were the story of the first days, extending Jarmusch's satirical metaphor about the state of our consumerist minds as we stumble towards ecological apocalypse. But these films also signalled Cannes' cultural shift towards genre cinema. There were thrillers (*The Whistlers*, *The Wild Goose Lake*), quasi-westerns (*Bacurau*), *policiers* (*Les Misérables*, *Oh Mercy!*), dark satirical comedies (*Parasite*), science fiction (*Little Joe*), softcore porn (*Liberté*; *Mektoub, My Love: Intermezzo*), and not many earnest slices of realism.

The Dead Don't Die was something of a sacrificial victim to the opening night slot, where a stiff and formal audience, having watched the cheesy opening ceremony, received the film only politely. This was not Jarmusch's crowd. *The Dead Don't Die* is drolly quaint about its slaughter, but it is gory, even though its zombies are as interested in their pre-death consumer choices – "Coffeeee", "Chardonnayyyy" – as they are in chomping entrails. By contrast, the zombie-like ghosts in **Atlantics** – women dressed as if for a nightclub but with whitened-out eyes – are secondary to Diop's rather Shakespearean set-up in which Ada (Mama Sané) loves construction worker Souleiman (Ibrahima Traore), although promised in marriage to rich Omar (Babacar Sylla). When Souleiman and his friends – who haven't been paid for months by Mr N'Diaye (Dianku Sembene), owner of the Dubai-like tower they've been building – decide to risk a dangerous journey by boat for a new life in Europe, the wedding goes ahead, but is interrupted when the marital bed is set on fire. Issa (Amadou Mbow), a local cop, suspects Ada and the absent Souleiman. Enter the ghost women, who invade N'Diaye's house at night demanding the missing men's wages. The film's evocation of Dakar life – high, low and otherworldly – is so rich, and the cinematography so sparkling that you forgive the occasional narrative obscurity.

CANNES TOP TEN
NICK JAMES

1. **Portrait of a Lady on Fire** Céline Sciamma
2. **Zombi Child** Bertrand Bonello
3. **Parasite** Bong Joonho
4. **Once upon a Time in Hollywood** Quentin Tarantino
5. **Atlantics** Mati Diop
6. **Pain and Glory** Pedro Almodóvar
7. **Beanpole** Kantemir Balagov
8. **Bacurau** Kleber Mendonça Filho & Juliano Dornelles
9. **The Traitor** Marco Bellocchio (below)
10. **It Must Be Heaven** Elia Suleiman

Bonello's **Zombi Child** is a bravura evocation of Haitian Vodou that pairs a narrative about an enslaved 1962 zombie with that of a present-day Haitian girl at an exclusive Parisian *lycée*. An approximation would be Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) intercut with Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Innocence* (2004). The 'authentic' zombie story concerns Clairvius (Bijou Mackenson), drugged, entranced into a deathlike condition and buried alive so that his memory is destroyed and he can be disinterred to cut sugar cane for his masters at night. Intercut with his travails is the cautious friendship between Fanny (Louise Labèque), a privileged white teen, and Mélissa (Wislanda Louimat), a coolly distant Haitian newcomer. Fanny's yearning for her absent boyfriend drives her to seek help from Mélissa's Vodou-practising aunt Katy (Katiana Milfort). Bonello's fearless panache ensures that this intertwining of moods and eras works. Some might accuse him of appropriating a culture not his own, but his film is at least as fascinating and electric as Diop's.

Atlantics and *Zombi Child* were more interested in myth than violence, but **Bacurau**, directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles (Mendonça's regular production designer), brought us back to a hefty body count and a Sergio Leone feel for blackly comic twists taken at a leisurely pace. The remote village of the title, in Brazil's desolate north-east, has had its water cut off and no longer appears on electronic maps. The villagers – ornery, resourceful and fun-loving – don't take it kindly when some hostile alien force, represented at first by a tiny UFO-like drone, tries to wipe them out. A vivid modern-day quasi-western then unfolds that resembles a surreal mix of *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and *The Most Dangerous*

For richer, for poorer: Korean director Bong Joonho's bravura Palme d'Or-winning *Parasite* is a multi-layered anarchic black comedy with political punch

Game (1932). If Udo Kier as a fastidious bad guy is predictable, the convincing eye-popping fury of androgynous local outlaw Lunga (Silvero Pereira) offers a counterbalance.

Mendonça, a former film critic, was astonished to find himself on the Grand Théâtre Lumière stage receiving the Jury Prize, which *Bacurau* shared with documentarist Ladj Ly's fiction debut **Les Misérables**, a magnificently choreographed *banlieu* cop thriller, set in the Parisian suburb of Montfermeil. Both films feature drones capturing key information, but that's all they had in common. *Les Misérables* is a restless portrait of urban tensions, focusing on three cops: Chris (Alexis Manenti), a white racist rule-breaker; Gwada (Djebril Zonga), a nervy and compromised black career cop; and Stéphane (Damien Bonnard), a newcomer who wants to do it by the book. They're up against it when a menacing group of tooled-up Romany circus men arrive, looking for a black kid who stole their lion cub. The semi-corrupt mayor won't help them, so Chris offers to do so, with predictably disastrous results. The film is brilliant on the power dynamics between the local mayor, the Muslim Brotherhood, disenfranchised teens and the police, and while the characters are sometimes too emblematic, the pace is fast and the tension keeps ratcheting up.

Several crime dramas featured in Competition. Arnaud Desplechin's investigative drama **Oh Mercy!** – excellent cinematography notwithstanding – is like a solemn, procedure-focused pilot for a *Line of Duty*-style cop series, with Roschdy Zem as a godlike police inspector indulgent of the human foibles of his officers and of the two women (excellently played by Léa Seydoux and Sara Forestier) suspected of murdering an elderly housebound neighbour. Diao Yinan's **The Wild Goose Lake**, his follow-up to the Berlin winner *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (2014), is a gorgeous, dreamlike, injured-hoodlum chase movie that takes us through stunning, rain-sodden Chinese locations, including many wonderfully strange encounters and lovely pastiches of great *film noir* moments. Its two leads, Zhou Zenong (Hu Ge) and Liu Aiai (Gwei Lun Mei), are as haunted by fate and duplicity as a film like this demands.

One of the few Competition disappointments was Corneliu Porumboiu's neo-*noir* drug gang thriller **The Whistlers**, which posed as a mystery with an edge of deadpan humour. The premise seems to strive for weirdness: bent policeman Cristi (Vlad Ivanov) is sent to the island of La Gomera in the Canaries to learn a whistling language of the Guanches, a tribe once native to the island, so he can communicate with the drug gang without being understood by surveillance. But the film, though fabulously shot, seems too interested in lampooning genre portentousness and mocking James Bond-style trappings – luxury cars, the incredible beauty of gang moll Gilda (Catrinel Marlon, making much of a thin role). It left me cold and unintrigued.

Cop land: Damien Bonnard, Alexis Manenti and Djebril Zonga in Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables*

Best of the crime films was Marco Bellocchio's **The Traitor**, a docudrama about high-ranking Cosa Nostra squealer Tommaso Buscetta (brilliantly played by Pierfrancesco Favino).

'Bacurau' gave us a hefty body count and a Sergio Leone feel for blackly comic twists taken at a leisurely pace

The opening bombardment of names is overwhelming, but stick with it and this layered portrait of Sicilian criminal mores gets richer and richer. The courthouse scenes – with a ring of cells full of gang bosses shouting cuckold insults – are extraordinary, and no doubt based on real transcripts. Buscetta is arrested in Brazil just after 'Totó' Riina, boss of the Corleone clan, has murdered all of Buscetta's Sicily-based associates, including his two sons, and several women and children. For Buscetta, this latter breach of the honour code gives him the right to testify, which he does most effectively. One extraordinary shock had me almost flying out of my seat, but I won't spoil it here.

Inflictions and addictions

The most surprising award was the Dardennes winning the Best Director prize, not because **Young Ahmed** wasn't as well crafted, sensitively directed and powerfully acted as usual, but because this portrait of a teenager coming

Mati Diop's *Atlantics*

Mendonça and Dornelles's *Bacurau*

Bertrand Bonello's *Zombi Child*

under the influence of Islamic fundamentalism was more muted and enigmatic than their other films – though it has a dramatic ending that left my head spinning.

Young Ahmed was certainly more fluent in making its points than Ken Loach's tale of a zero-hours-contract delivery driver **Sorry We Missed You**. Loach wielded a broken arm in a sling as he said his final goodbye to Cannes at his premiere. It was a poignant moment for this British director, whose films have so tirelessly fought for the victims of consumer capitalism. *Sorry We Missed You* is a bleak and accurate exposition of Catch-22 self-employment in the digital age, and it moved many. Sadly, it's one of Loach's weaker films, drawn from a too-familiar script by Paul Laverty that scores all the right political points but is too pat and mechanical. Flag-waving elements of the British press had to look to Emily Beecham's Best Actress win in Jessica Hausner's first English-language film **Little Joe** for a surprise British triumph. Again, this is a film of tremendous craft and execution, a sci-fi eco-horror about a laboratory-mutated flower species that may be controlling its human carers. Beecham plays Alice, the designer of the flower, which she names after her pre-teen son Joe (Kit Connor), but which her colleague Bella (Kerry Fox) is convinced is taking over people's minds. That the central concept is somewhat thin is borne out by slightly silly scenes (would genetic engineers really be astonished by a journal article that shows pollen entering the nose and affecting the brain?).

When Pedro Almodóvar, who has never won the Palme d'Or, put so much of himself into **Pain and Glory** he might have guessed he would gift Antonio Banderas his best-ever role, a nuanced and subtle mirroring of the director's traits for which he deservedly won the Best Actor Prize. Careworn as never before, Banderas plays fictional film director Salvador Mallo, a cautious figure reduced to self-reflection (and self-medication) by pain. Since Almodóvar has reproduced his own apartment right down to the book spines, we can take this portrait as a selfie, and wonder how he could make such an elegant, wistful and mischievous film if he really was, like Mallo, just a rueful ghost of his former self. When Mallo's previous film, *Taste*, is resurrected at the Madrid cinematheque, he decides, on a whim, that he wants the film's lead actor, Alberto Crespo (Asier Etxeandía), for the Q&A, even though they fell out years ago. They meet and bond over 'chasing the dragon', which gives Salvador access to his past – recalling his mother Jacinta (Penélope Cruz) and the passion that overwhelmed him when he watched a labourer strip naked. Exquisitely put together though *Pain and Glory* is, I wonder how interesting it would be to anyone unfamiliar with the director's work.

If Kantemir Balagov's astonishing second feature **Beanpole** was in Competition (as rumour suggests was originally intended), it could have been another Palme d'Or contender. In Leningrad in 1946, survivors of the terrible two-year siege are adapting to peace. Nurse Iya (Viktoria Miroshnichenko), nicknamed 'Beanpole', is subject to occasional fits that leave her 'frozen' for minutes. She is devoted to her fragile boy Pashka, but he dies in a terrible accident, after which Masha (Vasilisa Perelygina), a female soldier with whom Iya is clearly besotted, comes back into her life. Masha is Pashka's real mother and she now insists that since she is no longer capable of bearing a child, Iya, who finds men repulsive, must have a child on her behalf. The relationship becomes ever more twisted by circumstance and by the nasty streak Masha has been left with by her appalling experiences at the front. It's a film of rare intensity that investigates, with intricate precision, the huge psychological cost of total war.

Siege mentality: Kantemir Balagov's *Beanpole*

Well-made, well-acted realistic melodramas such as **The Invisible Life of Eurídice Gusmão**, Karim Aïnouz's steamy and luscious adaptation of Martha Batalha's hit novel, are increasingly rare. Set in the 1950s, this tale of women of unfulfilled potential sees the teenage Eurídice (Carol Duarte) falling in love with a sailor and disappearing to Greece. When she returns, pregnant and abandoned, her father disowns her. Meanwhile, her older sister Guida (Júlia Stockler), a talented pianist who believes Eurídice is still in Europe, conforms, gets married to a boor and raises children instead of going to the conservatoire in Vienna. The framing device is that the estranged sisters write each other letters without knowing if their sibling ever reads them. Elegantly directed, beautifully performed and invisibly edited, this is film craft up to classic Hollywood standards.

Well-made, well-acted realistic melodramas such as 'The Invisible Life of Eurídice Gusmão' are increasingly rare

As familiar as Palestinian Elia Suleiman's stance of deadpan bemusement at the world is to his fans, he finds new jocular circumstances in which to mildly mock humanity in **It Must Be Heaven**, which sees him travel from Nazareth to Paris and then New York in search of film funding, while contemplating passing fancies and the nature of neighbours. Palestine, of course, has the most interfering of neighbouring countries,

The Invisible Life of Eurídice Gusmão

Ken Loach's *Sorry We Missed You*

but Suleiman does not labour that relationship this time – notwithstanding one scene in which Israeli soldiers try out sunglasses in a car with a blindfolded woman in the back. Instead, he looks for common traces of absurd militarism and reveals French and American attitudes towards the roving Palestinian exile. It's as droll, hilarious, gentle and insightful a film as one could wish for. It won Suleiman a 'Special Mention', often an invidious and patronising gesture, but it did not feel so this time.

Gas and air

The two films critics seemed to spend the most time talking and messaging about – Terrence Malick's **A Hidden Life** and Abdellatif Kechiche's **Mektoub, My Love: Intermezzo** – were, for me, colossally indulgent mistakes. In subject, theme, morality and approach they could not be more different, yet what they have in common is that they both use a story framework to explore a ponderous private agenda.

A Hidden Life dispels any hope that Terrence Malick might break his recent streak of gormless preachy films, with their aversion to dialogue and drama. The opening shot is of a lush green mountain slope just begging for Julie Andrews to run over its crest, but instead we meet a cute young mountain village couple, with husband Franz Jägerstätter (August Diehl) saying in voiceover: "I thought that we could build our nest high up in the trees." Jägerstätter, his wife Fani (Valerie Pachner) and their children live a farming life so wholesome and good-looking that you almost forgive their endless canoodling and the film's Christian ad-land version of good honest toil.

The real-life couple were devout Catholics who refused to support Hitler. Jägerstätter gets called up in 1940, but after the fall of France, farmers are allowed to return as important war workers and he faces resentment from families whose sons are at the front. When he's called up again in 1943, he refuses the oath of loyalty, thereby setting himself on a path to execution, but the film seems only vaguely concerned about it. Malick is more interested in his characters' musings about the wind, the sky and the trees. The war barely intrudes. Malick prefers the banal questioning voiceover he must consider his contribution to today's cinema: "How simple life was then. No trouble could reach our valley. We lived above the clouds. What's happened to our country?"

Mektoub, My Love: Intermezzo is the middle film of a planned triptych, and ostensibly a joyous, if repetitious, celebration of women twerking to techno in a nightclub, seen through the male gaze. I'm at a disadvantage in not having seen the first film, *Mektoub, My Love: Canto Uno*, but I'm told *Intermezzo* continues with the same beach-beautiful group of Franco-Tunisian youth. Kechiche's flagrant insistence on framing a female bun bonanza that would make Tinto Brass blush makes recounting the scanty plot details here irrelevant. A 15-minute scene of bathroom cunnilingus is said to have upset the participating actress Ophélie Bau at the Cannes screening. However, while the Anglo-Saxon response has been universally condemnatory, several French critics rate the film. I found the experience more hellish than fascinating, but then I do hate techno.

Mektoub, My Love: Intermezzo

Alive and fabulous

The jury had a hard choice for the Palme. It could have gone to any one of *Pain and Glory*, *Atlantics*, the actual winner Bong Joonho's *Parasite*, Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* or Quentin Tarantino's **Once upon a Time in Hollywood** without me raising an eyebrow. Of these, only Tarantino's would be seen by Hollywood as a 'major movie', although *Parasite* may yet surprise us at the box office.

Tarantino's paean to 1969, the transitional moment when studio films were wilting under the heat of television, and the young guns of the New American Cinema were only just firing up, isn't his great comeback, but for most of its 159 minutes, it is a dazzling patchwork of media historiography not short on charm – you know QT knows what happened at every venue he highlights. It's built around the friendship between fading TV star Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his body double and stuntman Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt, gliding through the role as serenely as Gary Cooper), and there's a kind of loose-limbed spikiness to the relationship that makes it more of a double-act than a contest. The most beguiling sequence is Cliff's visit to the Spahn movie ranch, which has been taken over by the Manson family; it's beautifully paced for maximum suspense. Tarantino's pre-screening announcement to the press asking them not to reveal what happens towards the end was probably counter-productive, but I'll abide by it.

Tarantino's paean to 1969 isn't the great comeback some have claimed, but it is a dazzling patchwork not short on charm

Sciamma's **Portrait of a Lady on Fire** deserved more than the Best Screenplay Prize it won. It's an exquisitely sensitive costumer centred on Marianne (Noémie Merlant) a 19th-century female painter sent to an island home to paint the wedding portrait of Héloïse (Adèle Haenel), who's fresh out of a nunnery and doomed to be wed. Like most films centred on paintings, the actual art is a weakness, but *Portrait* is all about the nuances and grace notes of falling in love at a time when that love was inconceivable let alone forbidden. Marianne is instructed not to let Héloïse know that she's observing her for a portrait because Héloïse doesn't want the marriage and so won't sit for it. When Héloïse's mother, the Comtesse (Valeria Golino) goes away for a few days, the two young women fall for each other, blithely abetted by housemaid Sophie (Luàna Bajrami). All three actors are superb, the film is entrancingly lit to look like paintings of the time (Ingres comes to mind), and the subject of portraiture is used lightly as a pleasing commentary device. There is something sublimely overwhelming about it.

Korean director Bong Joonho's **Parasite** was the favourite film of nearly all my colleagues and it is the sophisticate's choice, a multi-layered anarchic black comedy with political punch; a bravura treat liable to make an audience squeal with delight. Like last year's Palme d'Or winner, Koreeda Hirokazu's *Shoplifters*, it introduces us to a family living under dire circumstances, but thereafter all resemblance to the Japanese film ends, for this is a greed-driven super-resourceful family bent on more than survival. Through a school contact and papers forged by his sister Ki-jung (Park So-dam), the son Ki-woo (Choi Woo-sik) cons his way into becoming the tutor to the daughter of a super-rich family. Seeing the opportunity for the whole family's enrichment, Ki-woo sets about having the domestic staff replaced one by one by his sister, father (Song Kang-ho) and mother (Chang Hyae-jin). Thereafter Bong's trickster muse hits full flow as a massive rainstorm looms and the fortunes and opportunities of the two families become more precariously intertwined and the comedy gets very dark indeed. Don't miss this film when it reaches you. It epitomises the best of Cannes' 2019 genre jamboree.

Quentin Tarantino's *Once upon a Time in Hollywood*

Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

CANNES

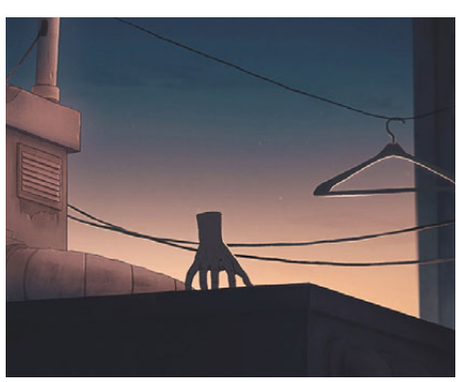
DARING BUDS OF MAY

You need hands: Jérémy Clapin's *I Lost My Body* (above, below) winner of the Critics' Week Grand Prize

Alongside the Competition entries, this year's Cannes had plenty of exciting, innovative filmmaking on offer from newer, less starry names

By Isabel Stevens

Stepping out at midnight on to a less starry sidestreet in Cannes I came across a reminder that it's an uphill struggle for the underdogs, even if your one-of-a-kind dynamo film is selected for the most prestigious festival in the world. The screening of French animator Jérémy Clapin's first feature **I Lost My Body** was over and a small audience of charged but weary people trickled out. On the door to the cinema was one of those tear-off flyers, the kind you might make when you're advertising painting or babysitting services. Here were the contact details of the film's sales agents offered as a keepsake.



Lorcan Finnegan's *Vivarium*

César Díaz's *Our Mothers*

Levan Akin's *And Then We Danced*

I'm not actually worried about the fate of *I Lost My Body*, particularly now that it's run away with the Critics' Week Grand Prize and been picked up by Netflix. Hopefully, people around the world will soon be asking, "Have you seen that severed hand film?"

Like many films in Cannes this year, the story – about a hand battling its way through Paris to be reunited with the rest of its body – has a genre kick. But alongside action and body horror, the surreal odyssey has a touch of romance, as well as some topical musings on the immigrant's lot in France and the precarity of the gig economy. It's surprising quite how much you can root for a dismembered limb: imagine if Thing from *The Addams Family* had its own action franchise, lovingly rendered in 2D drawings. The plucky five-fingered *flâneur* tours airshafts, rooftops, rubbish trucks, babies' bedrooms and the Metro, on a frantic tour Baudelaire might envy. Along the way, it sees off predatory animals in a series of ingenious set pieces while reminiscing wistfully about its former full-bodied life. The film is adapted from the novel *Happy Hand* by Guillaume Laurant, the screenwriter of *Amélie* (2001) – though Clapin sidesteps any of the cutesiness that *Amélie* might bring to mind.

In animation circles Clapin is no secret, thanks to his breakout short *Skhizein* in 2008. Another, even longer established talent finally gaining wider attention is the sixtysomething illustrator and comic artist Lorenzo Mattotti. He even designed Cannes's festival poster in 2000, but has only just presented his first feature in Un Certain Regard. **The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily** adapts Dino Buzzati's 1945 novel about two travelling storytellers who must engage a bear with one of their yarns or risk being his dinner. In Mattotti's version, the storytellers' cautionary environmental fable about bears' relationships with humans is sumptuously sketched in the illustrator's fauvist style, mixing smooth shapes with a zingy palette. Mattotti's vision of nature is infused with fantasy; particularly memorable is the way he envisions Sicily's mountains as creamy, bulbous towers. Billowing bear ghosts and a giant stripy Cheshire-style cat with a moustache complete the film's chimerical entourage. Although its tender father/son tale wears a bit thin and could do with a few more female bears, it's a charming ode to the art of storytelling.

The only other animated feature at the festival, **The Swallows of Kabul**, exemplifies the worrying fascination Cannes seems to have with delving into the past to uncover clichéd tales of women battling oppression. Zabou Breitman and Eléa Gobbé-Mévellec's film (based on Yasmina Khadra's 2002 novel of the same name), about the spread of Taliban totalitarianism in the Afghan capital in the late 1990s, contains scene after scene of poetic watercolour imagery but feels didactic. It was not alone in this: **Papicha**, the debut of Algerian filmmaker Mounia Meddour, portraying a young woman resisting Islamic extremism, was a manipulative and predictable affair with a clunky script. Equally worthy but with far more visual *élan* was **Song Without a Name**, by the Peruvian Melina León, a *Roma*-esque monochrome rallying cry against social inequality, set in the outskirts of Lima. Inspired by real-life child-trafficking cases in the 1980s, León's film centres on a young indigenous woman whose baby disappears. The traditions and destitute lives of the Quechua people are faithfully chronicled, and cinematographer Inti Briones proves a talent to watch with her misty and brooding shots in claustrophobic Academy ratio. But the characters lack nuance and the story, which strangely splinters, never develops into much beyond a tirade.

The perspective of 'Our Mothers' shifts to the female survivors, and Díaz picks a sensitive, restrained approach to the traumatic stories

Far more impressive were two other Latin American debuts both of which pointed to an auspicious future for Central American arthouse cinema outside of Mexico. César Díaz's **Our Mothers** confronts the violence – including the genocide of the indigenous Mayan population – in Guatemala during the 1980s and 90s, but from the remove of the present day: Ernesto is a young forensic archaeologist helping families to find their missing relatives from exhumations of mass graves. He's also on the hunt for his own father, a guerrilla killed by the military during the civil war. Gradually, the perspective of the film shifts from Ernesto to the female survivors, and Díaz wisely picks a sensitive, restrained approach to the traumatic stories of rape and mass murder that emerge, most of which are delivered in unemotional, composed testimonies.

Diaz's film received the Caméra d'Or (the prize given to the best debut across all sections), but equally worthy and more formally adventurous was Sofía Quirós Ubeda's oneiric **Land of Ashes**, an intimate and ethereal coming-of-age tale that looks death in the eye. Quirós Ubeda, with the help of an excellent performance by Smachleen Gutiérrez, completely immerses us in the perspective of 13-year-old Selva, who lives with her grandfather in a coastal village in Costa Rica. The way Selva drifts between an imagination-filled childhood bubble (making up words, playing with torches under sheets) and tentative adolescence (trying out dancing and flirting with her school beau Fabián) is beautifully captured. As are the slanging matches with the only real mother figure in her life, her grandfather's frequently drunk friend Elena. Apichatpong

CANNES TOP TEN ISABEL STEVENS

1. **Portrait of a Lady on Fire** Céline Sciamma
2. **Parasite** Bong Joonho
3. **I Lost My Body** Jérémy Clapin
4. **Atlantics** Mati Diop
5. **Once upon a Time in Hollywood** Quentin Tarantino
6. **Land of Ashes** Sofía Quirós Ubeda
7. **Bacurau** Kleber Mendonça Filho & Juliano Dornelles
8. **The Lighthouse** Robert Eggers
9. **The Wild Goose Lake** Diao Yinan
10. **A White, White Day** (below) Hlynur Pálmason

Weerasethakul's dreamscapes spring to mind as Quirós Ubeda shows the boundaries between life and death to be porous. Magic realist touches mingle with these naturalistic scenes, as Selva whispers folkloric beliefs to us about nature and hangs out with what we presume is the ghost of her mother. Francisca Sáez Agurto's lyrical cinematography – which emphasises the teeming jungle that envelops the characters – helps to fuse the two modes. Firefly-filled nocturnal vistas and a haunting conversation between two shadows are just a couple of the visual highlights.

Good grief

Another film to closely align its rumination on death with the natural world while taking an experimental approach to portraying landscapes, was Hlynur Pálmason's **A White, White Day**. It's a film about grief that, with its remote camera, mostly keeps us at arm's length, a detachment the film shares with its protagonist, the retired cop Ingimundur (an insular and delightfully gruff Ingvar E. Sigurdsson). Instead of confronting the pain of his wife's death, he prefers to bury it by building a house for his daughter and granddaughter in the remote fjords. Before long he is channelling it into more sinister activities, hunting down a man he believes his wife had an affair with. Secrets gradually spill out, but the film works best as a character study rather than a thriller. Ingimundur's relationship with his granddaughter is particularly well sketched, revealing a softer, but never cuddly, side to the curmudgeon. The misty, inhospitable Icelandic landscapes, meanwhile, provide a brooding backdrop for this meditation on isolation and loss.

And Then We Danced was quickly dubbed the Georgian *Call Me By Your Name* because of its focus on the joyful sexual awakening of a young gay man, but no one in a Luca Guadagnino film has ever had to live off leftovers. Dancer Merab (Levan Gelbakhiani) dreams of joining the upper echelons of the National Georgian Ensemble where he trains. Handsome newcomer to the troupe Irakli (Bachi Valishvili) catches his eye and a burgeoning romance develops, one that has to be carried out in secret because of the country's repressive social conservatism. As a dance film it follows all the usual conventions, but its portrayal of the consuming fervour of first love is enchanting – Gelbakhiani's performance has an infectious euphoria. And despite implicit criticism of many aspects of the country's culture, in their tender portraits of the dancers at work director Levan Akin and cinematographer Lisabi Fridell reveal a reverence for Georgian traditions.

While Bong Joonho won the Palme d'Or for his excellent home-invasion tale *Parasite*, over in the Critics' Week sidebar was another singular domestic nightmare that deserves mention. Made on a far smaller budget, Irish filmmaker Lorcan Finnegan's **Vivarium** has an excellent, unusual title, a tickling premise, and Jesse Eisenberg and Imogen Poots to recommend it. Its opening sequence of a baby cuckoo going about its dastardly business could equally have worked as a coda to Bong's film. Delectably, the baby in the film is the invader: he's delivered in a cardboard box to a couple (Poots and Eisenberg) who are trapped on an immense, peopleless suburban estate. The baby comes with the instruction: "Raise the child and be released." It's a mischievous satire on the strict gender roles that suburban parenting demands. Poots is forced to play the primary carer, while Eisenberg tends the garden, digging a hole to freedom. While the vibrancy of its start dwindles towards the end, it has enough surreal tricks up its sleeve to hold your attention. "Finally," you think as you watch, "a film that revels in just how rotten estate agents are." (The one in *Vivarium* who imprisons the couple is played as a full-throttle fiend by Jonathan Aris). It's a pointed critique of the property woes of the young, addressing Ireland's current problems with high rates of homelessness despite the existence of ghost estates from the 'Celtic Tiger' years.

Song of the sea: Willem Dafoe and Robert Pattinson in *The Lighthouse*, directed by Robert Eggers

The way Selva drifts between an imagination-filled childhood bubble and tentative adolescence is beautifully captured

Sofía Quirós Ubeda's *Land of Ashes*

Robert Eggers has had the kind of career trajectory emerging filmmakers dream of: an inventive breakout debut (2015's supernatural period chiller *The Witch*) and a follow-up – the garrulous gothic sea shanty **The Lighthouse** – that's the chatter of the festival, despite playing out of the media glare, in the Directors' Fortnight sidebar. Madness and delusion swirl around this yarn about two bickering men tending a remote lighthouse in the angry sea off the North American coast in the 1890s. Do we trust the view young Ephraim Winslow (Robert Pattinson) has of the nightmare he faces, toiling away for Thomas Wake, Willem Dafoe's drunken windbag tyrant? Or is there some truth in Tom's claims of Ephraim's waywardness? "Swab, dog!" Thomas memorably spits at Ephraim. Eggers takes glee in the drudgery and squalor of the assistant's lot, particularly enjoying one chamber-pot-emptying scene. Meanwhile, Pattinson's very physical, anxious performance captures the gruelling nature of the toil and the psychological impact of isolation. Dafoe towers over the film with his magnetic, grisly seaman, but the odd tender moment prevents the Captain Ahab stereotype from taking over. While a little too long and occasionally too drunk on its own craziness, this blast of a film wins out in its atmosphere and style. The dictionary-head script is a delight and clearly the result of a lot of research (Melville and the 19th-century novelist and poet Sarah Orne Jewett are two of the sources noted in the credits). Meanwhile, the nearly square 1.19:1 aspect ratio, black-as-coal monochrome palette and cacophonous soundtrack make *The Lighthouse*, to quote its script, "sparkle like a sperm whale's pecker".

SERVING TIME

A bittersweet, comic portrait of the solidarity and friendship between female staff members at a Hooters-style restaurant in Texas, Andrew Bujalski's timely 'Support the Girls' should finally provide the breakthrough the director's talent deserves

By Jamie Dunn

'Double Whammies', the fictional Hooters-style restaurant at the centre of rambunctious new comedy-drama *Support the Girls*, has five golden rules plastered to the wall of its employees' locker room. Number one, written in all-caps, is: "NO DRAMA!" If Andrew Bujalski, the film's writer-director, were to come up with his own cardinal rule to display above his writing desk or pin up around his film sets, he might plump for something similar.

Over six features, the 42-year-old Boston-raised, Austin-based filmmaker has consistently avoided conventional dramatic rhythms. *Funny Ha Ha* (2002), Bujalski's bracing, low-cost debut, shot on 16mm, follows a Boston graduate for whom romance is a cycle of awkward disappointment. When it looks like she might finally get together with the indecisive boy she likes, his grand romantic declaration – the final line of the movie – gets garbled in the film's quicksilver sound mix, and the screen cuts to black. Meanwhile, in *Mutual Appreciation* (2005), Bujalski's low-key comedy of manners set among Brooklyn's hipster scene, a mild infidelity and potentially friendship-ruining betrayal is resolved with an amicable group hug. "I tend not to be that interested in huge moments," Bujalski tells me. "I'm always more attuned to the lower frequencies. To me, the most compelling situations are the ones where I'm not sure what the right thing to do is."

As one of contemporary American cinema's most dedicated chroniclers of shapeless lives and hazy emotions, he's won plenty of critical acclaim. Commercial success may have been less forthcoming, but Bujalski's features are so inexpensive that their failure to set the box office alight hasn't hindered his career. Not that he's above chasing an audience. The DIY aesthetic of his early films was very much part of the charm, but their scrappiness was always going to limit their reach. With his last film *Results* (2015) and now *Support the Girls*, however, Bujalski has made work that speaks the language of commercial cinema, with the biggest difference being the presence of professional actors – Guy Pearce, Cobie Smulders and Kevin Corrigan in *Results*; Regina Hall in *Support the Girls* – though the familiar faces and glossier visuals haven't dampened Bujalski's skew-whiff sensibility.

"I learned a lesson from the odd trajectory of my..." – he gives a pause worthy of his own inarticulate characters – "...let's call it oeuvre. I went from *Computer Chess* [2013], which was the weirdest thing I could think of, to *Results*, which in many ways was me trying to come up with the most conventional thing I could think of." He's not wrong. The former is a deadpan comedy set in the early 1980s at a convention for chess-playing software programmers, shot in scuzzy black-and-white on glitching vintage video cameras. The latter, superficially at least, is a bright, zesty romcom set in an Austin gym. Discussing *Results*, he says, "I thought to myself, 'I'm going to get two gorgeous people and they're going to kiss at the end'. But then the reception to both *Results* and *Computer Chess* turned out to be surprisingly similar: they were both perceived as bizarre. Although that wasn't a total surprise, I also thought, 'OK, I've learned something about myself, which is that no matter what, there's a certain aspect of my voice that's going to come through and it's going to be unusual.'"

While still far from conventional, *Support the Girls* looks like it could provide the modest commercial breakthrough Bujalski's talent has long deserved. The setting of a Texas sports bar that specialises in scantily clad waitresses and "big-ass beers" might suggest a raunchy comedy, but like all of Bujalski's films, there is more here than initially meets the eye – lurking within is an empathetic work of stealth feminism and a critique of late capitalism.

The film follows a frantic day in the life of Lisa (Hall), Double Whammies' indefatigable manager. Today's shift looks to be more trying than most. Not only are there new staff to train and an off-the-books car-wash fundraiser to organise (the cash is destined for an employee who needs a good lawyer after knocking down her abusive boyfriend with her car), there's also been an overnight break-in and the would-be-thief is trapped in the air duct. Even more stressful than a botched robbery, however, is that while removing the burglar from the ceiling, the local law enforcement has accidentally knocked out the cable ahead of the screening of that night's big fight.

The idea for setting a film in one of these so-called 'breastaurants' crept into Bujalski's consciousness after he ventured into one around a decade ago. "I was surprised by it," he recalls. "I don't know what I expected, but it felt stranger than whatever I had imagined." What threw him was the wholesome vibe. "The advertising emphasises the raunchiness, but once you actually walk into the place, it does not seem particularly raunchy at all. It's very much focused on comfort and projecting a certain sense of belonging." He was also struck by how uniquely American the concept was, to take a very basic human emotion like desire and sand off all the edges. "I thought, 'No other culture in history would generate the demand for such a place.'" In the light of his earlier work, it's easy to see why this arena would appeal to Bujalski's sensibilities, for these restaurants are places where emotions are being suppressed and misdirected.

LADIES IN WAITING
Regina Hall (opposite) stars as Lisa, the indefatigable manager of a Hooters-style restaurant, where she works alongside Haley Lu Richardson's Maci (top) and Shayna McHayle's Danyelle (above left, with Hall and Richardson)

While inducting some new employees, Lisa describes Whammies as "a family place", and she's not just talking about the clientele. Other members of the tight-knit ménage include waitress Maci (Haley Lu Richardson), an irrepressible bundle of enthusiasm who's a tad over-friendly with the customers and prone to letting off a confetti cannon when anyone's feeling blue, and Lisa's "wind beneath her buffalo wings" Danyelle, who's played to sarcastic perfection by Shayna McHayle, better known as rapper Junglepussy.

The pair would do anything for their line manager, and Lisa is not above exploiting this loyalty. When a soundsystem is required for the car-wash fundraiser, she's quick to send the reluctant Danyelle over to the neighbouring speaker store to seduce one of the clerks into lending them some equipment for the afternoon. But she's fiercely protective too, and more than ready to stand up to any burly customer who disrespects her girls.

First impressions suggest Lisa isn't your typical Bujalski type: her competence when dealing

I've realised that in casting these movies I'm attracted to oddballs. But by the same token, the oddballs are the only ones who are going to return my calls

THE RECKLESS MOMENT Andrew Bujalski (above) began the script for *Support the Girls* in 2015, worrying that the subject was too obscure, but following the election of Donald Trump and the rise of the #MeToo movement, the film feels absolutely of the moment

with the litany of problems that keep coming her way sets her apart from his earlier films' more irresolute protagonists. But as crises mount, Lisa's facade begins to break and she's revealed to have all the vulnerabilities, poor judgement and relationship neuroses that plague people in his other films. "My kind of character, whoever it is, is just someone who's trying to figure things out as they go along," he explains. "That's what's exciting to me about movies: watching people make decisions and experience emotions in real time."

After Hall's name was suggested to Bujalski, he flew down to New Orleans to meet her on the set of outrageous comedy *Girls Trip* (2017). "She's an extraordinarily charming human being," he says of Hall, "very sweet and very giving." They had a long chat over coffee, during which he knew he'd found his lead. "When you're in that situation, when you're considering somebody for a role, you're always doing this thing where you're trying to engage with the person, but there's also some part of your mind that's calculating – trying to see the character as you look at them – and all of that was feeling good in that situation." Another element of Hall's personality delighted Bujalski: she's a kook. "Regina is a little bit eccentric and that's very appealing to me. I'm starting to realise there's a certain self-selecting aspect to casting these movies and that I'm attracted to oddballs. But by the same token, the oddballs are the only ones who are going to return my calls in the first place."

As with all Bujalski films, there's an almost anthropological element to *Support the Girls*. Whether it's the meandering post-university twentysomethings of Boston in *Funny Ha Ha* or the timid programming pioneers of *Computer Chess*, he's a filmmaker with a documentarian's knack for scrutinising a social milieu. Small businesses are a particular interest. In *Beeswax* he explored the ins and outs of the vintage clothing retail racket, (2009), in *Results* the fitness industry; now sports bar management comes under his spotlight. "I've always tried to respond pretty particularly to whatever place we're in," Bujalski says. "I certainly hope they've got a unique sense of place. That's what gets me out of bed in the morning, the idea that maybe we can go and make a movie that nobody else is going to make if we don't."

Bujalski's films might be fine-grained in their examinations of micro-communities, but it's tempting to see *Support the Girls* in a broader context too. His five previous features tend to limit their concerns to the romantic entanglements of their characters. *Support the Girls*' scope is wider, touching on the casual racism of the bar's owner (he allows only one black waitress per shift), the endemic sexism that creates a demand for such a restaurant, and the economic realities of America today which result in women (particularly women of colour) choosing to work in such an establishment. Bujalski started the script in late 2015, which already felt like another era by the time it was made and released. "At the time, honestly, I was worried that we would never get anybody's attention," he says. "I thought, these are weird little places on the side of highways and unless you're a regular customer, you kind of ignore them and they don't mean much to you. So I thought we would just slip under the radar."

The first seismic event that suggested he might have tapped into something more universal was the 2016 US presidential election. "I didn't sleep that night," he recalls. "There were a lot of dark thoughts running through my mind, but one thought I had was: 'Well, I guess my script is relevant now.'" Then, while he was editing the movie, the Harvey Weinstein revelations broke and the subsequent #MeToo movement took off. Suddenly Bujalski's ebullient celebration of female solidarity felt absolutely of the moment. "The film was never meant to be a response to anybody's tweet of the day," he insists. "It was always about characters, humans and hopefully relatable human stories. So that was the prayer, that this story stays relatable and relevant no matter what the zeitgeist is."

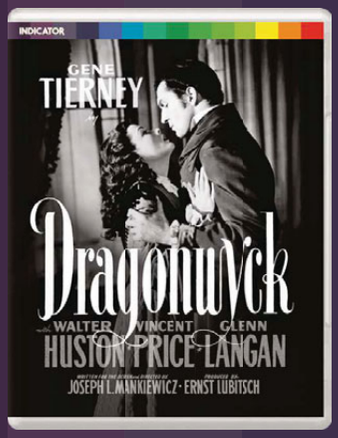
If *Support the Girls* doesn't end up endearing Bujalski to a wider audience, his next project will give him an immediate second chance: he's providing the script for Disney's live-action remake of *Lady and the Tramp* (1955). "I was curious to experience the process by which something I do turns into a Disney movie," he says. "I'll have to reserve judgement until I see it, but I'm just as curious as you are to see if there's any of my voice in it." Can we expect to see Bujalski attached to any other studio projects? "I'll consider anything when I'm just drinking a coffee and twiddling my thumbs," he says. "I'd also consider going to law school or getting a real job. But when I sit down to work, it's always going to be an old-fashioned movie that gets me most excited. So I've just got to keep my fingers crossed that we're still allowed to make them for a few more years."

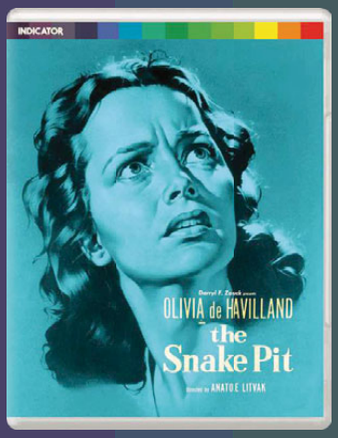
***Support the Girls* is released in UK cinemas on 28 June and is reviewed on page 78**

INDICATOR presents *Spring/Summer 2019*

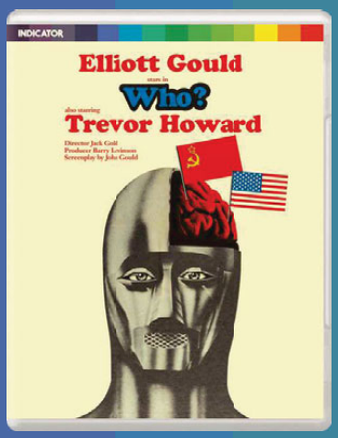
Unmissable Cinema

OUT NOW: Joseph L Mankiewicz's DRAGONWYCK (1946), Anatole Litvak's THE SNAKE PIT (1948), Max Ophuls' THE RECKLESS MOMENT (1949), and Robert Rossen's final film LILITH (1964).

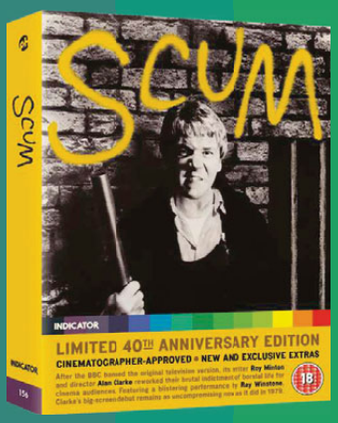


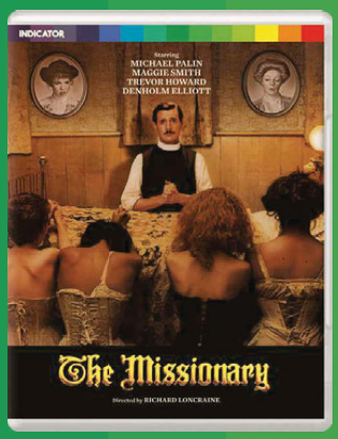


AVAILABLE MAY 2019: An eclectic selection of unhinged, genre-twisting British films including St John L Clowes' NO ORCHIDS FOR MISS BLANDISH (1948), Jack Gold's WHO? (1974), Richard Loncraine's BELLMAN & TRUE (1987), and Nicolas Roeg's TRACK 29 (1989) starring Theresa Russell and Gary Oldman.



AVAILABLE JUNE 2019: More British classics, including films by Jack Clayton and Alan Clarke.





See full details and buy direct from powerhousefilms.co.uk

LOOKING SHARP

THE LEGACY OF PAULINE KAEL

The impending centenary of her birth provides a good opportunity to look back at the peerless career of a film critic remembered for her acuity, fierceness and idiosyncrasy – a writer whose brilliant insights and withering put-downs inspire loyal adulation and bitter enmity like no other

By Farran Smith Nehme

Bored today? Feel a restless urge to start a fight? There are a million ways to do that on social media, but if you want to confine the combatants to film lovers, just mention Pauline Kael. Like magic, her fans and her detractors begin to circle. *Aux barricades!* This works, by the way, even if all you do is quote her. The fight comes gratis, like a dessert you didn't order but are somehow obliged to eat.

Kael's centenary is on 19 June. She published *I Lost It at the Movies* in 1965, and her landmark review of *Bonnie and Clyde*, which helped revive the movie's box-office fortunes and led to her job at the *New Yorker*, ran in October 1967. Film criticism is a frustratingly ephemeral calling, and few of its practitioners will be read as long as the movies they reviewed are watched. Not only is Kael still read, she still inspires passion.

She wrote a number of memorable pieces earlier in her career, notably 'Circles and Squares', an attack on what she saw as the absurdities of the auteur theory. It made quite a stir and permanently alienated Andrew Sarris and a number of other critics, foreshadowing the numerous enemies she would continue to make both inside and outside the industry. Other notable moments in Early Kael included her passionate appreciations of Kurosawa Akira's *Yojimbo* (1961) and Satyajit Ray's *Devi* (1960), as well as her setting fire to *The Sound of Music* (1965) – "We have been turned into emotional and aesthetic imbeciles when we hear ourselves humming the sickly, goody-goody songs" – which may or may not have gotten Kael fired from *McCall's* magazine. (Her editor later claimed it wasn't the pan of *The Sound of Music* so much as that Kael also disliked *Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962; *The Pawnbroker*, 1964; *A Hard Day's Night*, 1964; and *Doctor Zhivago*, 1965)

Kael's greatest era as a critic runs from her hiring by the *New Yorker* in 1968 to her departure for an abortive stint as a consultant to Paramount Pictures in 1979. That this stretch coincides with an astounding burst of film-making creativity – whether you call it New Hollywood, the American New Wave, or just the 70s – is often portrayed as a stroke of luck; Kael occasionally said as much herself. The truth is that great film critics make their own timing. They are sharply attuned to whatever the culture is reflecting, fomenting or ignoring. Otis Ferguson had the extraordinary cinema of the 1930s, and approached it with the same seriousness that he approached jazz, an attitude that set him apart. James Agee was himself more left-wing, more nostalgic and less patriotic than his key era, the 1940s, but he knew it, and that arrhythmic non-belonging made his writing all the more interesting. During the 70s, Kael shared her *New Yorker* role with the coolly intelligent Penelope Gilliatt, swapping perches every six months and giving readers stylistic whiplash. Gilliatt was a restrained, elegant writer whose career was tragically undone by alcoholism and a plagiarism scandal. As for Kael, by all accounts, half a year of pay wasn't enough to keep the lights on. Compiling and promoting her review collections and giving lectures kept her busy in her off-season, though she regretted losing the chance to review some movies when Gilliatt was on.

Kael's attitude as a critic was one of excitement, of restless yearning for pleasure. Lurking even behind her stiletto-flick insults (Clint Eastwood "isn't an actor, so one could hardly call him a bad actor. He'd have to *do* something before we could consider him bad at it") and sighs of boredom (1970's *Song of Norway* "brings back clichés you didn't know you knew") is a conviction that movies can thrill all the senses like no other art. As she might have put it – second person being one of her trademarks, like it or not – you can't approach

THE PERILS OF PAULINE Kael was in her 30s when she started reviewing films, and didn't arrive at the *New Yorker*, the magazine that made her name, until she was in her late 40s, but her work seems destined to last as long as the movies she was writing about

Altman, Allen, Scorsese, Spielberg, Coppola and De Palma (or Truffaut, Godard, Kurosawa, and Fellini) with the detached cocktail-party air of a critic like Brendan Gill. You have to give yourself over to them. Kael predicted this herself when she wrote about *Bonnie and Clyde*: "Our experience as we watch it has some connection with the way we reacted to movies in childhood: with how we came to love them and to feel they were ours – not an art that we learned over the years to appreciate but simply and immediately ours."

Kael on Clint Eastwood

He isn't an actor, so one could hardly call him a bad actor. He'd have to *do* something before we could consider him bad at it

"Reading her," wrote Roger Ebert, "was like running into her right after a movie and having her start in on you." Before Kael came along, the movie reviews in the back of the *New Yorker* were kept to a polite length encompassing a few paragraphs. Once she was there, however, hundreds of words became thousands. She liked to see movies with a proper audience, and her reviews usually ran well after a movie's opening, a luxury that we denizens of the hurry-hurry internet area can only marvel at. Even if the film was one she mostly didn't like, she wanted to ferret out the pieces worth savouring, as when she talks of Barbra Streisand and Louis Armstrong's duet in the mostly dire *Hello, Dolly!* (1969): "There they are – immortals – and the 'wow-wow-wow' scat sounds that come out of her throat are cries of relief from the restraints of the dumb, unsophisticated show and all those tight, square chorus sounds."

For a good movie somewhat short of a masterpiece, like Alan Pakula's *Klute* (1971), Kael loved to spend a lot of time examining the part or parts that reached the level of art; in this case, Jane Fonda's performance: "She has somehow got to a plane of acting at which even the closest closeup never reveals a false thought and, seen on the movie streets a block away, she's Bree, not Jane Fonda, walking toward us." And for a movie she did consider a masterpiece, such as Truffaut's *The Story of Adele H.* (1975), Kael didn't just watch, she basked in it: "Adele's love isn't corrupted by sanity; she's a great crazy. She carries her love to the point where it consumes everything else in her life, and when she goes mad, it doesn't represent the disintegration of her personality; it is, rather, the final integration."

Kael on the movies

We came to love them and to feel they were ours – not an art we learned over the years to appreciate

Kael's short time in Hollywood took a lot out of her, for reasons she explained well in the still-relevant essay 'Why Are Movies So Bad? or, The Numbers'. She went full-time at the *New Yorker* just as the adventurousness that had animated American moviemaking began to lose force, or at least studio funding. If her writing sometimes seems less vigorous in this period, that's partly because the movies were, too. When something exciting came along, Kael remained unforgettable, as in this review of *Casualties of War* (1989), which she considered the best of the late-80s cycle of Vietnam War movies. In many ways, it is peak Kael, with everything that irritates those who dislike her (that "we") and everything that I admire: a gut-level intensity of response that offers more of what it's like to watch *Casualties of War* than any other critic ever could.

> *"We in the audience are put in the man's position: we're made to feel the awfulness of being ineffectual. This lifelike defeat is central to the movie. (One hot day on my first trip to New York City, I walked past a group of men on a tenement stoop. One of them, in a sweaty sleeveless T-shirt, stood shouting at a screaming, weeping little boy perhaps eighteen months old. The man must have caught a glimpse of my stricken face, because he called out, 'You don't like it, lady? Then how do you like this?' And he picked up a bottle of pink soda pop from the sidewalk and poured it on the baby's head. Wailing sounds, much louder than before, followed me down the street.)"*

"Her words may have been vernacular," the critic Michael Sragow wrote, "but they're elegantly honed to fit a mood and a conversational flow. That's why her prose is almost as hard to excerpt in brief as dramatic dialogue." Kael was known for reading her columns out loud before publication, checking for anything awkward. She was known for other things, too, such as cultivating friendships with like-minded critics, Sragow among them, and for supposedly never seeing a movie twice, although she may have needed to do that less than others. In Rob Garver's recent film, *What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael*, critic David Edelstein talks about watching the recut *Touch of Evil* (1958) with her, and being astonished by Kael's ability to pinpoint every change from the version she had seen many years before. (Edelstein was often cited as one of Kael's acolytes, nicknamed the Paulettes, a name he rejects: "I'm a Paulinista.")

Roger Ebert on Kael

Reading her was like running into her right after a movie and having her start in on you

This self-taught, college-degree-lacking daughter of a chicken farmer wrote criticism by the brash authority she invested in herself. That has always got under people's skin, no one more so than Renata Adler, who wrote a now-legendary pan of Kael's 1980 collection *When the Lights Go Down* for the *New York Review of Books*:

> *She has, in principle, four things she likes: frissons of horror; physical violence depicted in explicit detail; sex scenes, so long as they have an ingredient of cruelty and involve partners who know each other either casually or under perverse circumstances; and fantasies of invasion by, or subjugation of or by, apes, pods, teens, bodysnatchers, and extraterrestrials. Whether or not one shares these predilections – and whether they are in fact more than four, or only one – they do not really lend themselves to critical discussion.*

It was a memorable moment in the history of Kael-hating, buttressed by truths such as the numerous 1970s movies

that do indeed have an abundance of horror, violence, casual sex and paranoid invasion fantasies, although Adler fails to convince me that's a bad thing. But the indictment loses considerable force if you read *A Year in the Dark*, a review collection from Adler's brief stint at the *New York Times*. In 1968, Kael was loving *Planet of the Apes* and *Rosemary's Baby* and *Barbarella*, and Adler was not: "In all of 1968, Hollywood produced scarcely any movies of any value," she lamented. Adler approached movies as though weeding a garden, and each review is overgrown with her sense that film is barely worthy of her prose: "...A lot of the mystique of the 'visual' seems to me silly and obscurantist." Adler was, in short, throwing down for the genteel school of *New Yorker* criticism that Kael had merrily obliterated, and indeed, after the hullabaloo of the Kael pan subsided, Adler's next work to get the same level of attention would be *Gone* (1999), an extended lament for the end of William Shawn's *New Yorker*.

It's odd, considering the fame that *New York Review of Books* piece continues to soak up, that when you return to *When the Lights Go Down*, you find it includes 'The Man from Dream City', Kael's tribute to Cary Grant: not only one of her best essays, but an astute look at exactly what actors of the Hollywood Golden Age were doing on screen. "Now the excess energy was pared away," she wrote about Grant in his post-war thrillers; "his performances were simple and understated and seamlessly smooth. In *Charade*, he gives an amazingly calm performance; he knows how much his presence does for him and how little he needs to do."

Kael will always be controversial, which will of course help keep her name alive – new generations of cinephiles will continue to rise up against her dislike of *Badlands* (1973). "Those of us who love her work and continue to be inspired by it are never going to have our minds changed by some Rotten Tomatoes-esque right/wrong binary reexamination of her taste," wrote critic Jason Bailey on Twitter. "It's the snap of her style, the energy of her prose, and idiosyncrasies of her taste that I hold dear."

That very idiosyncrasy can make it hard to cite Kael as a role model, as does our fractured media landscape that makes it nearly impossible for a critic to aspire to her kind of fame. And in any case, she was seldom explicitly feminist. Stephanie Zacharek, film critic for *Time* magazine and a friend of Kael, told me, "I never looked at Pauline and said, 'Wow, a woman can do this sort of thing, maybe I can too.' It was more a subtext: her very existence meant I never needed to question what a woman 'could' do, so I never did." But Kael remains a significant inspiration for many women film writers, including me, through her barrelling prose, her enduring influence, and above all her fierceness. My favorite part of Brian Kellow's 2011 biography was the story of Kael's visit to a hardware store in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where she lived:

"It happened to be Mother's Day, and the proprietor gave her a gift, adding in a condescending tone, 'Because you look like you're a mother or a grandmother.' 'Fuck you, Charlie,' Pauline replied. 'Do you know I've written ten books?'"

A series of films linked to Pauline Kael plays in the Big Screen Classics strand at BFI Southbank in June. A discussion event on Kael takes place in the BFI Reuben Library on 17 June

MISSION CRITICAL

On 25 July 1982, at London's National Film Theatre, Pauline Kael invited questions from the audience. Here, in an edited selection from a previously unpublished transcript of the event, she explains why good films make her a better writer

What film was it that started your great interest in the cinema?

I can't remember which, because I used to go to movies on my parents' and on my older siblings' laps. They didn't have babysitters in my part of Northern California in that period. It was a rural part. And also, movies were the closest thing you got to the big world. By the time I was at Berkeley, I had a considerable backlog of interest in them, although it never occurred to me I'd be writing about them. I started writing about them fairly late, I guess. I was in my thirties, and I didn't really start making a living as a movie critic until I was in my late forties. So, I got a very, very late start. Sometimes, when I'm waiting in a queue to see a movie, I feel a little startled when I look around and see I'm the only person in my age bracket who is interested in that movie, but that's simply how it worked out. Since I started out writing for literary quarterlies, and film quarterlies, magazines such as *Partisan Review* at home, and *Sight & Sound* here, it took me a very, very long time to become, what is called, a professional film critic, and it didn't happen until after my first book was published, when I had some offers in New York and I needed a job, and so went and took them. I worked in a number of places before I found a berth where my reviews would not be tampered with. So, I've stayed at the *New Yorker* for some... God, since the beginning of 1968! But they have lived up to their agreement. The editor has never changed a word without consultation, and then we both get out our swords if he wants something that he thinks is too strong taken out.

Do you think you were born a cynic, or has American society, or American TV, made you one?

I'm not really. I'm this incredibly upbeat person who's already attacked for praising movies that nobody else sees anything good in. I think it's a certain kind of tough-mindedness. I don't think I'm cynical about human relations, or in other areas. I'm very sentimental as a mother and grandmother – exceedingly so. I feel great sympathy, sometimes, for these directors who have loused up their movies, when you can see how they've loused them up out of fear, because I do see the pressures and I do see how hard it is to get the OK on anything. Their energy is often exhausted on a project before they start shooting it, because it has taken them two years, maybe, to get it rolling, and they've had to compromise; they've lost the cinematographer they wanted who went to some other project, they've lost the actors they wanted, they've had to cut out the best parts of the scripts in order to make it fit the budget they've been given. I have about as much understanding for all that [as possible], but the fact is, as a

critic, I'm trying to judge what's on the screen, and tell you what I think of it.

So, when I write about a movie, I try to keep what I know about how it was made and what happened, out of it as much as possible and see what's up there. I never do interviews with directors. I never go to press conferences. I never will talk to a director if he calls me before my review is out. I don't want to know what he thinks he put on the screen; I want to go to the movie, look at it, and then write it up. Then, if he wants to talk, it's fine. Very often critics go with this built-in feeling of what the man went through, and what it means to him, and also they've gone to press conferences where he told them how tough it was to do, and how hard he fought, and how he put up his house as collateral, and all the rest of it. And they review that, instead of what's up there.

Looking back on your long altercation with the critic Andrew Sarris on the auteur theory, are there now any directors that you look on with more favour, or turn away from of the ones that you championed?

Well, you say my long altercation... My side of it existed strictly in the back of *Film Quarterly* in 1963 or '64. I've never said another word about his theory in print. So, the altercation is not on my side, but I tend to look at a movie in terms of what's on the screen. Then, if a man makes several good movies, I think, "God, this is a good director" and it doesn't necessarily hold. For example, I've thought that Alan Parker's work was an abomination, but I thought that his work was very fine on *Shoot the Moon* [1982], that he had a good script, and maybe the right script for him, because he had experienced something of what the hero had gone through, I assume, and he was able to give something special of himself to it.

I don't look at movies in terms of the auteur theory, which generally finds the work of certain directors marvellous, apart from the qualities of the individual film. I think the auteurists have most recently leapt on John Carpenter, who I find a singularly uninteresting director so far. He has a certain facility that showed in a couple of early films, and the later ones are really quite poor, but I could be fooled by his very next movie. I tend to be more pragmatic about the individual movies, and I think you would find that over the years, what has happened with the auteurists is that they have become champions of a certain kind of classicism, which is to say that Sarris generally does not like any new work done by Americans, but rediscovers David Lean every season. I tend not to be a great enthusiast for *Ryan's Daughter* [1970] or some of the later Lean works.

I think, really, most people who set themselves within a theory begin shifting around in it so they can accommodate what they really like, and that Sarris's tastes are really very classical and that he's rather hostile to young work. So much of this is a matter of your own personality and what you like, and what you don't like. I, for example, am not much of an Antonioni person. I was always a Godard person because his pace was more attuned to mine. I get very impatient at a movie like *L'eclisse* [1962] or some of the other Antonionis; I want him to get on with it. You have to allow for the personality of critics. Partly now, because I've been doing it for a long time, I do allow myself the luxury of skipping over films that I can't stand often – unless they're enormous successes, and then I feel I should say something about them. But if I think they're going to flop anyway, like Carpenter's *The Thing* [1982], I skip it, because I don't think criticism should be a duty; it should be a pleasure. If you write dutifully, it shows in your prose and in your attitudes, and particularly since I've already said what I thought of Carpenter, and he hasn't made any new movies that changed what I think of him, I'll wait until he does something very good, or something that I really like, and then write about it. I know that daily newspaper critics can't take these privileges, but I simply have assumed it, and because I write for a magazine that allows me to pick what I want to write about, I have been able to escape bludgeoning people that I have bludgeoned before, which is not fun for them or for me.

I know there's a general theory that critics love to pan. I can only tell you that, in this individual case, it is not true. I really love a movie that opens out something different to me, because it gives me a chance to write about something that I've never tapped before. Of the pieces in recent years that I've enjoyed writing the most, I think it was *Get out Your Handkerchiefs* [1978], the Bertrand Blier film; I loved writing about that, because he dealt with different areas of sexual experience, and it gave me a chance to think about things I'd never thought about before. So, I got a chance to be a better writer. Whereas, if I write about bum movies all the time, I feel I'm contracting in sensibility and as a writer, and it's an awful feeling, because you really feel you're a hack if you're going to complain about the new George Roy Hill, having complained about the last George Roy Hill. Well, he must've felt the same way, because I wasn't allowed in to see his new movie!

One of your favourite movies of the last few years was *Blow Out* [1981]. Can you tell us why?

Yes, Brian De Palma is a director who has never, perhaps, been adequately appreciated out of his own country and perhaps too little in his own country, because he works at a very sly and sophisticated level. It's very American, in a way that other people don't tune in to too easily. But, in the case of *Blow Out*, I think he was trying to press beyond himself. It's a very subtle murder-mystery. In a sense, it's a metaphor of the country – and of the movie-maker – but nothing is made explicit; it's all in your reactions to it. Technically, he is perhaps as fine a craftsmen as any but the two or three top directors such as, perhaps, Altman, Coppola, Scorsese, Spielberg; one might say that they knew more about certain areas of filmmaking, but I'd say he's getting right up there.

If you saw *Dressed to Kill* [1980], you could certainly see how he could set a mood and get eroticism and wit both working in a sequence. He's a very sly and funny caricaturist in many ways, and maybe because it's so American in its comedy, it hasn't gone over very well in other countries. But he's working with very complex themes within the murder-mystery and suspense format, and I think people have looked at his films and tended to see them in much simpler terms; for example, a number of feminists protested *Dressed to Kill* simply because women are some of the killings there. But the women are not degraded in any way, the women are treated very lovingly, and there is an ironic quality about the death of

'There is an ironic quality about the death of Angie Dickinson in *Dressed to Kill*, but the audience took it morally. This is a constant problem... The people who make movies are often sophisticated, and it doesn't occur to them that their movies may be taken on a simpler level'

'*Eraserhead* is an amazing film about men's anxiety states on dating, their terrors of their wives, their children and their parents-in-law. That man is every adolescent boy's image of himself on a date. It is a hair-raisingly scary movie. David Lynch is phenomenally gifted'

Angie Dickinson in that movie. Here is this lovely woman who's trying to find herself, and the first time out, she gets killed for really trying to find some pleasure. I don't think it was meant morally in any sense, I think it was meant ironically, but the audience took it morally. This is a constant problem. The people who make movies are often very sophisticated, and it doesn't occur to them that the movies may be taken on a simpler level than they are sometimes taken; that was the problem for Martin Scorsese with *Taxi Driver* [1976]. Certainly, when I saw it, it never occurred to me that anyone could possibly applaud the taxi driver at the end, because it was hair-raising to know that psychopath was out on the streets, but apparently people were applauding him. Well, the same thing happened with Peckinpah and *The Wild Bunch* [1969]; he certainly didn't think the people were going to be cheering the violence in that movie, but when they started cheering it, then he was rather pleased.

You mentioned some of the feminist objections to *Dressed to Kill*; I wondered what you thought of some of the cheaper options, like *Visiting Hours* [1982]?

Well, there is a general phenomenon in horror movies. The reason for the abuse of teenage girls is very simple. These movies are made to appeal to teenagers. And teenage girls are easier targets to set up than teenage boys, because you can introduce a certain amount of sex that way. For some strange reason, kids seem to love these movies in which they are the victims because they also are the characters, and older people don't go to them very much. Older people take them rather more seriously, and think of the killings and the attacks on the women sexually and all, in rather serious terms, whereas the kids who go to them on Fridays and Saturdays at drive-ins, or wherever, don't take them that seriously, and love being scared that way. I can't take it quite as seriously as some people do. I do think there are films in which the attacks on women are possibly a reaction to the feminist movement, and do express a certain amount of hostility, but I think it's simple opportunism for most of those teen thrill movies. People who couldn't possibly get anything else financed can raise money to make a teen horror movie, and a certain number of thrills have to be guaranteed in that kind of movie.

I do think that in the whole society there has been a resentment of women for wanting their rights; you can feel it all the time. I was recently waiting for a long time for a cab, on a corner, and just as a cab came up and I was starting to move in, a man pushed me out his way and stepped in and yelled after me: "You wanted your rights?" I mean, there is hostility alright, but there was that in the old 'Bluebeard' movies too. Men who felt hostile to women have always had certain movies they could go to, but the teen thing is more-or-less teen thrills. These pictures are generally hits with boys and girls because kids, when they go out dating, I think it brings them closer together, in the simplest physical way, if they are being terrorised on the screen.

At the beginning of your talk you mentioned the audience. It seems to be that, not only is the audience absent, but with a lot of films, the audience doesn't want to listen any more. I went to see *Jaws* [1975], for example, and the reason it succeeds is that the audience is in the aisle, walking around, talking, they're looking every 20 minutes at some sort of sensation, then they're back to their own conversations.

In the case of *Jaws*, that is the kind of movie that got most of us interested in movies when we were children, because we enjoyed that kind of primal terror. I loved the modernity of the characters; the fact that Robert Shaw, the old shark hunter character, was really the macho fool, and the young ichthyologist was very much like a Woody Allen character; he was anti-macho, he was learned, and he made us like him, he made us see how absurd that old macho man was, who really wanted to get them all killed to prove what a strong man he was. The great fun for the audience, I think, was when the shark gobbled up Robert Shaw. We wanted to see him get it because he had done it to them all. In seeing, say, Robert Shaw crumpling the beer can, and then Richard Dreyfuss crumpling a Styrofoam cup, you cannot miss the irony; it was a real counter-culture film built into a primal horror film. It had immense good nature all the way through, and very rarely are people who make horror films skilful enough to keep you laughing and keep the good nature going. It just seemed to me that only a man with a terrific eye, and a terrific sense of film rhythm, could've gotten us and shocked us so well.

I would hate it if through getting more sophisticated about movies, I abandoned the movies that originally got me interested in movies. I do think that as we get more knowledgeable, we should not decide that Fassbinder is necessarily a better director than Steven Spielberg; as a matter of fact, I'd say he's a lot less good a director. But it is hard sometimes, if you grow up on a particular kind of film, you feel you've gone past it, but I do think Spielberg's work is always modern.

***Eraserhead* [1977] has been one of the most extraordinary films of the last few years. Can you say something about American avant-garde film and is it coming into the major studios?**

Eraserhead is an amazing film, because as clearly as you can figure at what you're seeing – even though the pacing is monstrous and it takes too long – it has a quality I don't think I've ever seen in another film, which was about men's anxiety states on dating, and their terrors of their wives, and their children and parents-in-law. I mean, that man is every adolescent boy's image of himself on a date. It is a really hair-raisingly scary movie. I quite love it, and I do think David Lynch is a remarkable talent as he showed again with *The Elephant Man* [1980], because that script was absolutely zilch, and he turned it into something quite marvellous.

There are images in [*Eraserhead*] that stay with you the way images from *The Blood of the Poet* [1932] or *Un chien andalou* [1929] do. The image of that man and the hooker from across the hall; when they're on the bed making love, and they deliquesce into the bed itself, and finally you see they disappear except for the woman's long hair floating on the bed. That is a pretty scary, powerful erotic image. The whole film has a strange erotic feeling to it; you can't quite put your finger on what's going on at any given moment that's holding you there, but you're being held. Considering that he's using pasteboard sets, it's a wonderful piece of work. He's a phenomenally gifted filmmaker.

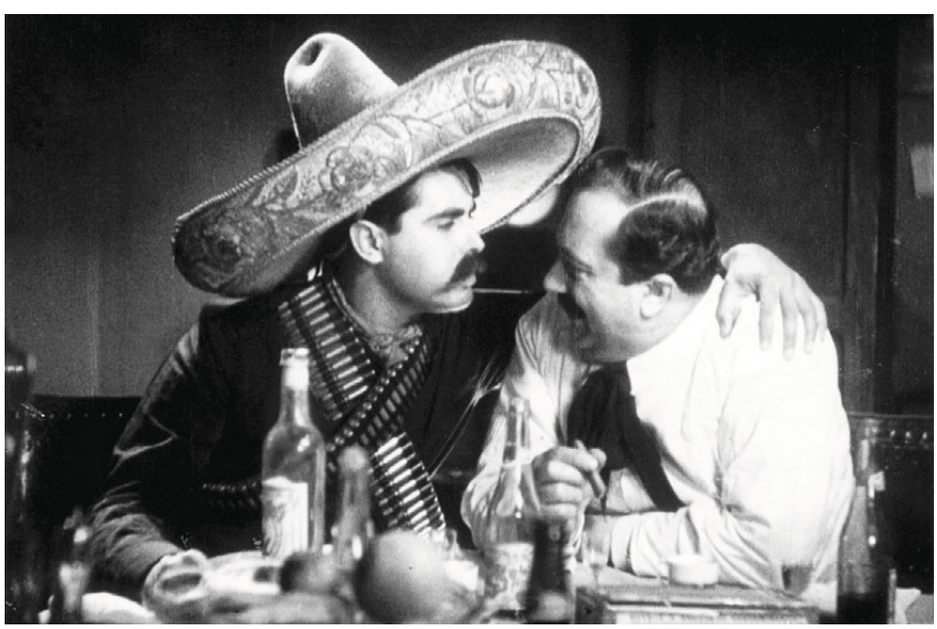
THE GOLDEN AGE OF MEXICAN CINEMA

During the middle decades of the last century, Mexico became a powerhouse for film production in Latin America, giving rise to a generation of fabulously talented directors and stars. From the revolutionary films and melodramas of the 1930s through the emergence of *noir* in the 40s to the rural dramas and *rumberas* of the 40s and 50s, the period saw the creation of a cinema so vivid and affecting that it helped to define the very concept of Mexican identity to a population struggling to adapt in an era of rapid and bewildering modernisation. **By Chloë Roddick**

In an essay published by the BFI in 1995, the writer Carlos Monsiváis described the Mexican film industry as having "greater sociological than artistic significance", suggesting not just a close relationship between film and culture in the country, but one in which Mexican society could be understood through its cinema. Without accepting the qualitative judgement in this statement (that is to say, without undermining the enormous artistic importance of decades of Mexican cinema) or ignoring external influences, it is interesting to note how between 1930 and the early 1960s (a period that can loosely be defined as the Golden Age of the country's cinema), genres and styles, archetypes, narratives and ideologies reflected the fears and aspirations of a country undergoing significant social, economic and political change. And if, as Monsiváis goes on to suggest, the relationship between Mexican cinema and its public was reciprocal and symbiotic – with audiences "plagiarising" from cinema, trusting that films would "explain how to survive in a bewildering age of modernisation" – it is equally interesting to trace in the popular genres, films and filmmakers of the period, a certain interrogation of Mexican identity/identities and the search for something new.

What is certain is that the Golden Age was a period of prolific and sustained production (an average of 24 films made per year in the 30s, rising to an extraordinary 107 per year through the 50s) that saw the development of a robust industry model based in Mexico City; one with large studios, a star system and a pool of talented directors and crew. Not only was Mexico the epicentre of cinematic production in Latin America, but films made during the period also garnered international recognition, as well as box-office success at home. The Golden Age only began to fade with advent of television in the 50s, which alongside other complexities within the national industry, ultimately led to a decline in both output and quality by the late 60s.

With sound came the first examples of the Revolution as genre, using its symbology as pretexts for stories of adventure



Revolutionary road: Fernando de Fuentes's Mexican Revolution drama *Godfather Mendoza* (1934)

Revolution, gothic cinema and early melodrama: the 1930s

Not only was the early development of Mexican cinema more or less concurrent with the Revolution (1910-20), but the conflict also helped the nascent business to thrive. Cinemas sprung up in towns and cities (in 1911 some 33 new theatres opened) as audiences flocked to see documentary 'views' that were immediate and 'truthful'. With the development of sound cinema came the first examples of the Revolution as genre: fictionalised versions of the conflict that used its easily recognisable symbology – the uniformed general, the peasant soldier, the countryside – as pretexts for stories of adventure. Unusual in this context for their harshly critical stance are a trilogy of films made by Fernando de Fuentes: *Prisoner 13* (*El prisionero trece*, 1933), *Godfather Mendoza* (*El compadre Mendoza*, 1934) and *Let's Go with Pancho Villa* (*Vámonos con Pancho Villa*, 1936).

Godfather Mendoza exposes the weak morals of the upper class through the story of Rosalío Mendoza, a wealthy landowner whose allegiance changes as he tries to maintain his status. Mendoza's tragic, existential undoing – he ends the film drunk and alone, devastated by the consequences of his actions – offers a subtle but serious critique of the psychological burden left by the Revolution, one that is developed in *Let's Go with Pancho Villa*. Mexico's first ever super-production (which bankrupted the studio that made it), the film is about a group of idealistic young men who join the fight, only to suffer and die one by one under the command of an uncaring Villa. Staunchly anti-militarist and critical of the violent cruelty of the Revolution and its leaders, the film also ends with the disenchantment of a solitary man – a soldier who returns home alone, his ideals crushed. De Fuentes's films suggest a certain disenchantment engendered by the complexity and brutality of the Revolution, but they also hint at continued disappointment through the 1920s and 30s, a period that saw enduring civil unrest, political instability and poverty.

If De Fuentes's trilogy and the wider revolutionary genre offer a clear and direct reaction to early 20th-century Mexican history, it is interesting that nascent Mexican sound cinema was also drawn to dark

María full of grace: Emilio Fernández's *Enamorada* (1946), starring María Félix, regards the Revolution as a noble cause that protects the Mexican *pueblo*

gothic horror stories. In the mid-1930s a handful of such films were made and released around the same time as the trilogy: including Ramón Peón's *La llorona* (1933), De Fuentes's *El fantasma del convento* (1934) and Juan Bustillo Oro's *Two Monks* (*Dos monjes*, 1934) and *The Mystery of the Ghastly Face* (*El misterio del rostro pálido*, 1935). While the influence of contemporaneous Hollywood horror cinema as well as that of gothic literature cannot be ignored, these films were arguably also a more subtle and obscure response to the violence imprinted on the collective psyche by the Revolution, with stories dealing in paranoia, fear and repression: ghostly figures, corpses dripping blood, psychosis and – almost always – thwarted romantic passion.

Two Monks remains one of the most significant early works of the genre, telling the story of two friends embroiled in a complex psychological struggle for the same woman – erotic tension and violence bubbling beneath the surface of an outwardly respectable household, or beneath the apparently fraternal friendship between two men. The film was masterfully shot by Agustín Jiménez, an important but underappreciated Golden Age cinematographer, whose use of long, imposing shadows and stark chiaroscuro reflect the influence of German expressionism. Coupled with a surrealist set design – a house full of skewed furniture, dramatic curves and one enormous window that never quite seems straight – the film is distorted and disturbing, right up until its nightmarish ending. The fears expressed in these Mexican gothic films are shadowy and unknowable, but ultimately related to a disruption of traditional order: in *Two Monks* the threat – to relationships between men, class stability and religion – is displaced on to the figure of the female, who becomes a violent point of rupture (a trope that would be taken up with relish by later Mexican *noir* films).

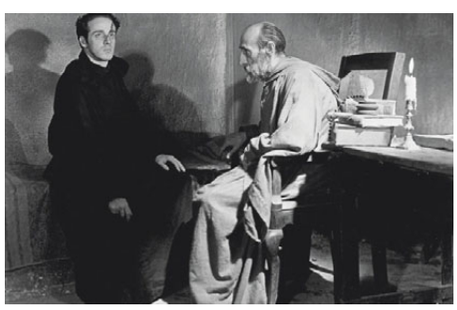
The first examples of Mexican 'brothel melodramas' exhibit a similar concern with the female body as a site of potential transgression.

Tie me up, tie me down: Julio Bracho's crime thriller *Another Dawn* (1943)

Arcady Boytler's *The Woman of the Port* (*La mujer del puerto*, 1934) is widely considered the genre's first masterpiece, rich in highly stylised expressionist imagery (thanks to the work of cinematographer Alex Phillips), surrealist *mise en scène* and Soviet-style montage. Based on Guy de Maupassant's short story 'Le Port' and influenced by Antonio Moreno's *Santa* (1931, Mexico's first film with synchronised sound), the film charts the moral decline of Rosario (Andrea Palma), who, following the death of her father, is forced to find work in a brothel. Extraordinarily provocative for its time, *The Woman of the Port* deals not only with overt, commercialised sexuality but also with incest, both of which are linked to the arrival of a ship full of navy soldiers to the *puerto*. In *Santa*, the protagonist's downfall is the direct result of her relationship with a revolutionary soldier – when he abandons her, her brothers banish her from the *pueblo* and, like Rosario, she is driven into a cabaret (a brothel, but with more dance numbers). In both films the female protagonists represent a dangerous, uncontained sexuality, while urban

Mexican cinema's fascination with criminality, neurosis and duplicity is connected to the panic engendered by modernisation

Future shock: Roberto Gavaldón's *In the Palm of Your Hand* (1951)



Juan Bustillo Oro's *Two Monks* (1934)

Arcady Boytler's *The Woman of the Port* (1934)

spaces (epitomised by the brothel/cabaret) become symbolic of sin and transgression.

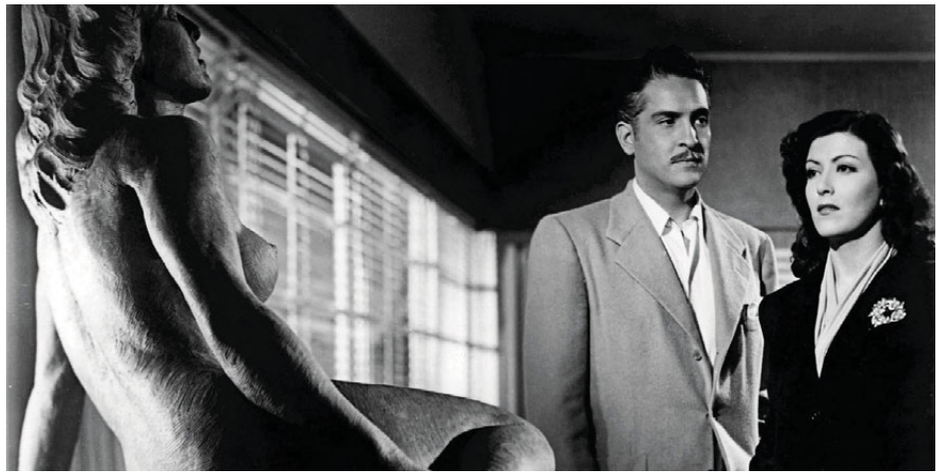
If the melodrama was originally a Hollywood import, it was soon embraced by Mexican filmmakers, remaining a dominant genre throughout the Golden Age (one statistic suggests that in 1944 72 per cent of films made in Mexico were melodramas; 62 per cent in 1951). Hot on the heels of *The Woman of the Port* came De Fuentes's *Out on the Great Ranch* (*Allá en el Rancho Grande*, 1936), a melodrama-cum-*comedia ranchera* (a uniquely Mexican musical genre, with a rural or ranch setting) that was the country's first great commercial success at the cinema, paving the way for both rapid industrialisation within the industry and the enduring popularity of the genre. That early Mexican melodramas were also typically concerned with a certain dichotomy between rural and urban spaces – symbolic of, respectively, an idealised, morally upright and fixed social order; and an immoral world of crime and sex – can also be seen as a by-product of the disruption engendered by the Revolution. The romanticisation of rural spaces reflects a nostalgic longing for a kind of pastoral paradise lost, while the vilification of the city suggests a fear of modernisation and urbanisation as potential destroyers of established (moral) values.

The mantle of rural nostalgia would be taken up in the 1940s by Mexican director Emilio '*El Indio*' Fernández, while these early melodramas can be considered precursors to other films made in the 1940s and 50s, particularly the *noir* or the *rumbera*, in which ideas about the city as a home for sin would be more thoroughly – and sensationally – explored.

Crime and *noir*: the 1940s

The 1940s were a boom period for Mexican cinema thanks in large part to increased investment from the United States and the development of the Banco Cinematografico, a fund aimed at modernising production means. It was a decade that bore witness to the growth of the fledgling Mexican auteur cinema – directors like Fernández, Roberto Gavaldón, Julio Bracho and Alejandro Galindo dominated – as well as the consolidation of the Mexican star system, in the prevailing image of María Félix, Dolores del Río, Pedro Armendáriz or Arturo de Córdova.

While much of the world was reeling from the effects of World War II, Mexico benefited from a long period of uninterrupted economic growth – often referred to as the Mexican Miracle – that lasted from the 1940s well into the 60s. Rapid industrialisation, modernisation and urban development saw the emergence of a new, wealthy middle-class that flourished under the governments of Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-46) and Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-52). But with urban growth came a series of new social problems, including the development of *barrios bajos* (poor, slum-like neighbourhoods) that were home to a criminal underworld peppered with cabarets and bars, where money talked and morality was increasingly redundant. With their undertones of melodrama and detective cinema, films like Bracho's *Another Dawn* (*Distinto amanecer*, 1943) and *Twilight* (*Crepúsculo*, 1945); Gavaldón's *The Other One* (*La otra*,



Stone cold: Arturo de Córdova and Gloria Marín in Julio Bracho's thriller *Twilight* (1945)

Because the night: Roberto Gavaldón's urban *noir The Night Falls* (1952)

1946), *The Kneeling Goddess* (*La diosa arrodillada*, 1947), *In the Palm of Your Hand* (*En la palma de tu mano*, 1951) and *The Night Falls* (*La noche avanza*, 1952), or Galindo's *Los dineros del diablo* (1953) began to reflect a preoccupation with the fate of the new urban man.

Bracho's films are key to understanding the emergence of the *film noir* genre in Mexico. *Another Dawn* is essentially a crime thriller, telling the story of Octavio (Armendáriz), a union member looking for documents that will implicate a corrupt governor, and Julieta (Andrea Palma), an old flame from his university days. What sets the film apart is its positioning of the shadowy city as protagonist, with its violence, criminality and clandestine spaces (most notably the cabaret), as well as DP Gabriel Figueroa's moody photography and the presence of a mysterious, seductive female character, who, if not quite a femme fatale, is certainly a predecessor.

Twilight is a much more fatalistic take, charting the terrible moral undoing of Alejandro (De Córdova), a surgeon tortured by obsessive desire for his best friend's wife Lucía (Gloria Marín). An intense and dark psychological thriller, the film was unusual both for its time and within Bracho's own body of work, closer thematically to Buñuel's *El* (1953, also starring De Córdova as a man destroyed by female sexuality). Alejandro's descent into psychosis begins the moment he lays eyes on a naked stone statue of Lucía in one of the film's most striking sequences – "That's when I first saw the shadow of the monster that would lead me to tragedy," he muses, as the shot fades to black and we cut to Lucía's brightly lit, immobile face. Though Lucía still isn't quite a femme fatale, and while the film displaces her threat on to the stone statue (an important symbol that would be developed in Gavaldón's *noir* film *The Kneeling Goddess*), her presence *is* devastating to masculinity and order.

Twilight was followed by a series of important collaborations between Gavaldón and Alex Phillips. In *The Other One*, one of the first great films about social disenchantment in Mexico, foreshadowing Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950), María (del Río) is a poor manicurist who, obsessively jealous of the affluent lifestyle of her sister Magdalena (also played by del Río), contrives a plot to assume her identity. Driven by a cold ambition and lack of moral conscience absent in representations of women in the revolutionary or melodramatic models, María is much closer to the kind of femme fatale typical of the then burgeoning *noir* scene in Hollywood, or even in Gavaldón's own *In the Palm of Your Hand*, in which De Córdova plays an unscrupulous clairvoyant devastated by the influence of the cruel and unfeeling Ada (Leticia Palma). María is, at once, both femme fatale and protagonist, seducer and seduced, self and other, a duality that Gavaldón and Phillips explore by way of oblique camera angles and the repeated motif of the mirror, which suggests not only a fear of the double nature of women (María/Magdalena) but also of a perceived moral decline towards unscrupulous greed.

While it is only with hindsight that these films have been grouped together as examples of *film noir* – they have also been called political or crime thrillers, police films, even urban melodramas – their fascination with clandestine city spaces, criminality, neurosis, duplicity, the undoing of the modern man and the terrifying sexuality of his female counterpart, is deeply connected to the urban panic engendered by rapid modernisation in Mexico in the 1940s. And if they ostensibly offer a kind of counterpart to the rural films made during the same period, or to certain aspects of the melodrama, they also reflect the same fear of rapid development; that same yearning for values lost, or desire to understand what it meant to be a modern Mexican.

Love story: a poster for Emilio Fernández's romantic comic melodrama *Enamorada* (1946)

Much like Mexican noir, the rumbera genre reached its peak in the late 1940s thanks to a boom in nightlife and cabaret culture

Dolores del Río in Gavaldón's *The Other One* (1950)

An alternative Mexico: Emilio Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa

At the same time that *noir*s were enjoying popularity at the Mexican box office, one of the Golden Age's most important and prolific directors, Emilio Fernández, was also gaining notoriety (both at home and abroad) for a wholly

different kind of cinema. In her 2012 book on Fernández, Dolores Tierney highlights the period between 1943 and 1950 as one in which he "was regarded as one of the foremost purveyors of 'Mexicanness'". A string of films made during that time – including *Wild Flower* (*Flor silvestre*, 1943), *María Candelaria* (1944), *Enamorada* (1946), *The Pearl* (*La perla*, 1946), *Río Escondido* (1947) and *Maclovia* (1948) – offered a new style of Mexican cinema, one that celebrated a rural and conservative (often indigenous) Mexican identity.

Mexican writer Julia Tuñón Pablos has suggested that the director's filmography is "characterised by its single-mindedness... [we] can look at it as if it were a single film" and, certainly, these films present a homogeneous and easily recognisable cinematic universe, replete with the same visual motifs: vast dramatic skies that overwhelm the human figure; trees, magueys and cacti; monuments (churches, temples, statues) that represent tradition and order; long, low-angled shots that highlight landscapes or extreme close-ups of Mexican faces. Narratives tend to be driven by the same prevailing ideology – what Fernández himself called a 'thesis', necessarily containing a strong moral and social content – and focused on nationalism, the plight of the indigenous people, or the need for education. What's more, through most of the 1940s the director worked not only with the same DP (Figueroa) but also with the same writer (Mauricio Magdaleno), editor (Gloria Schoemann) and, more often than not, the same cast (Pedro Armendáriz, Dolores del Río and María Félix).

In *Maclovia*, perhaps one of Fernández's most representative rural films, Armendáriz and Félix play poor, illiterate lovers from the indigenous island of Janitzio. A simple and harmonious order is reflected by Fernández in the way he privileges image over dialogue – in a series of long, slow-moving shots of the fishermen at work (reminiscent of Emilio Gómez Muriel and Fred Zinnemann's 1936 socialist film *Redes*), or the framing of Maclovia against dramatic Michoacán skies, always wrapped in her trademark shawl. But the island's harmony is disrupted by the arrival of soldiers from the mainland; soldiers with "*ojos claros*" (light-coloured eyes) who have no respect for indigenous order (the laws of the island state that no one can leave, and that Janitzio's women should only marry its men) and who look down on the "*indio mugroso*" (dirty Indian).

In *Enamorada*, a romantic comic melodrama also starring Armendáriz and Félix as lovers, a proud revolutionary general, Juan José, falls in love with Beatriz, the rude and haughty daughter of one of the town's richest men. Félix here plays the archetype of the role she was already becoming known for – strong-minded and beautiful, a subjugator of men – while Armendáriz, though brutish and macho, is ultimately presented as an anti-capitalist defender of the poor (at one point he berates a local merchant: "You monopolise the stock and raise the prices. And what about the people? Let them pay! And let them starve!"). Resolution is achieved when Beatriz is finally won over by the general's charms and takes on a subservient role, rejecting wealth and family in favour of purer revolutionary ideals.

There's something about María: María Félix in Emilio Fernández's *Maclovia* (1948)

Just as *Maclovia* is concerned with upholding the dignity of the poor, indigenous Mexican against a threat from external forces, *Enamorada* essentially posits the Revolution as a noble cause, necessary to protect the integrity of the Mexican *pueblo* from capitalism and greed.

Like other films made by Fernández and his team in the 40s, both *Maclovia* and *Enamorada* aimed to develop an almost mythical style that would consolidate the Mexican identity around traditional values and thereby, like the melodrama, go some way towards soothing post-revolutionary fears. That these films were so successful abroad (Fernández's films screened at Venice, Locarno and Cannes, where he won the Grand Prix for *María Candelaria* in 1944) also suggests that this was a vision of Mexico that was universally popular, easy for non-Mexicans to assimilate and seeming to substantiate the director's claim that "there only exists one Mexico... the one I invented".

Rumberas: late 1940s and 1950s

Though reportedly with some reluctance, Fernández also began making urban films at the end of the 1940s, perhaps because by

Hot spot: Rodolfo Acosta and Marga López in Emilio Fernández's *rumbera* film *Salón México* (1949)

then his formulaic model was beginning to fall out of favour with Mexican audiences. Films like *Salón México* (1949) and *Victims of Sin* (*Víctimas del pecado*, 1951) represent a transition from the director's rural, more nationalistic work towards more urban concerns, specifically the increasingly popular *rumbera* film. A fascinating hybrid genre, the Mexican *rumbera* had manifold and disparate influences, including the extravagant studio musicals made in Hollywood in the 1930s, the femmes fatales of *film noir* (both Mexican and from abroad) and the Afro-beats of Cuban rumba music, wildly popular in Latin America for most of the first half of the 20th century. Much like Mexican *noir*, the genre reached its peak during the late 1940s thanks to a boom in city nightlife and cabaret culture.

In *Salón México*, Mercedes (Marga López) is a cabaret dancer and prostitute who works with the sole purpose of supporting her virtuous younger sister Beatriz and providing her with an education. In *Victims of Sin*, Violetta (Ninón Sevilla), also a dancer and prostitute, adopts the baby son of a co-worker after she unceremoniously throws him in the bin (significantly, a bin located directly in front of Mexico City's Monument to the Revolution) shortly after giving birth. Both films stick closely to the values established by Fernández's earlier work: consider a scene in *Salón México* in which an impassioned speech on heroism (essentially defined as self-sacrifice for the nation) is interrupted by a cutaway to military planes flying overhead; or a cabaret owner in *Victims of Sin* telling Violetta that in his brothel there is no hierarchy: "We are all common, working people." What's more, even while both protagonists are prostitutes, and even if they are presented as independent and strong-minded, Fernández's films made sure to position both women in the role of self-sacrificing mother, representative of and reproducing traditional values and structures. *Salón México*'s musical refrain, which references the country's first indigenous president, leaves the director's position clear: at the end of the film, from the dark street outside the cabaret we hear: "[Benito] Juárez shouldn't have died. The nation would have been saved. Mexico would be happy".

Alberto Gout's *Aventurera* (1950), commissioned as a star vehicle for Sevilla, is widely considered the masterwork of the *rumbera* genre and offers a much more telling example of the shift in representation of women during this period of Mexican cinema. Sevilla plays Elena, an upper-middle-class woman sold into prostitution by a criminal acquaintance after her mother has an affair and her father commits suicide. Rather than positioning the virtuous mother against the figure of the fallen woman, the film quickly disposes of the maternal to engage instead in an unabashed and fetishistic celebration of Elena's beauty, street-smarts and barely contained eroticism. A fast-paced plot, peppered with extravagantly choreographed dance numbers (arranged by Sevilla herself), does something to distract from the extraordinary cruelty that Elena suffers in the film's first half. Critical of the city space as criminal and violent (the film takes place in the cities of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico City and Guadalajara), *Aventurera* is unusually liberal in allowing its protagonist the possibility of a happy ending, perhaps paving the way for films that would deal more kindly with prostitution in years to come, or even heralding the *fichera* films or sex comedies (Mexican cinema's answer to *Carry On...*) of the 1970s and 80s.

Ninón Sevilla in Alberto Gout's *Aventurera* (1950)

Sevilla in Emilio Fernández's *Victims of Sin* (1951)

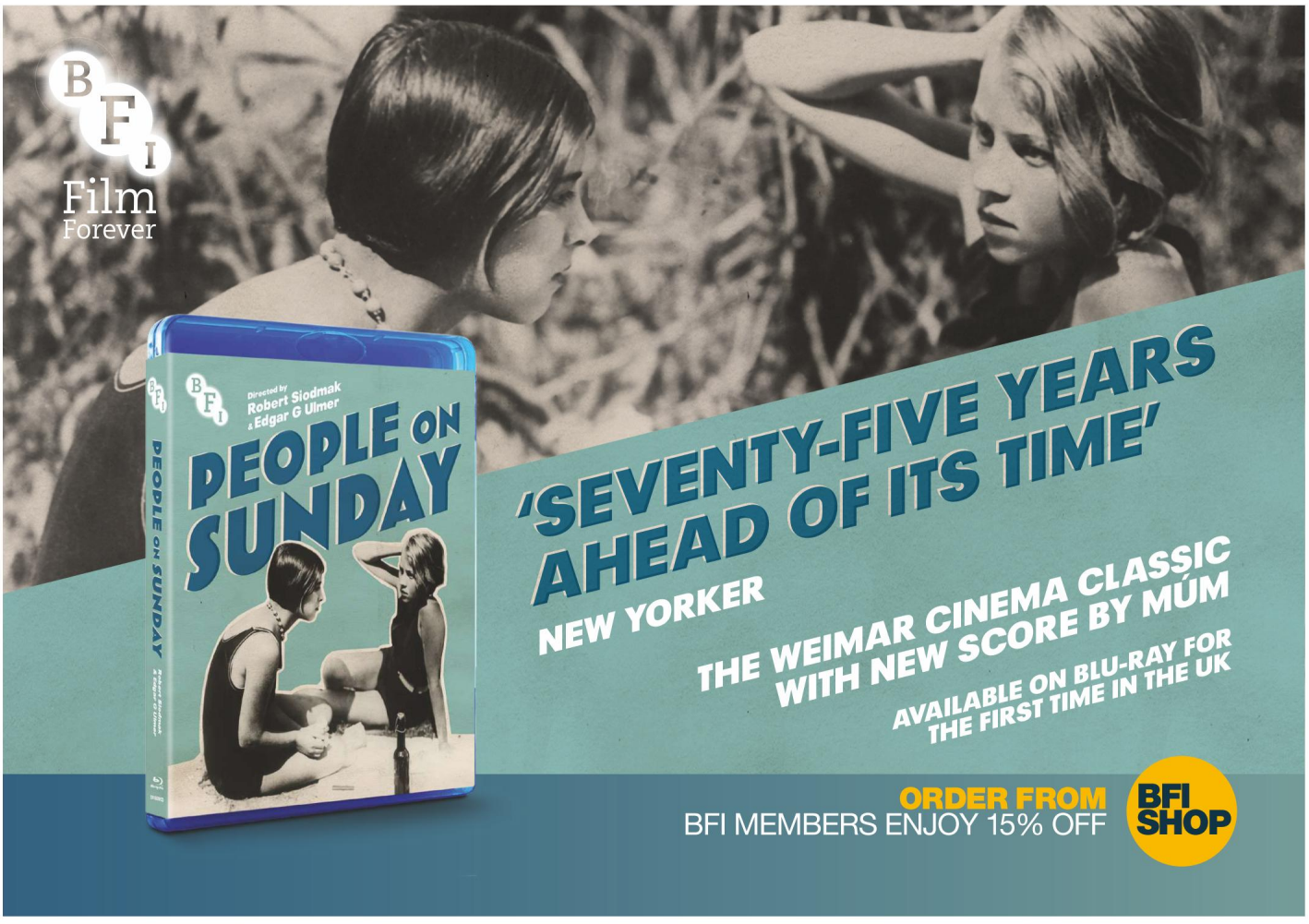
Macario and Mexicanness: 1960

Towards the end of the Golden Age, Gavaldón made *Macario* (1960), a magic-realist fantasy set in colonial Mexico about a poor peasant who makes a pact with Death. Featuring extraordinary photography by Figueroa, the film is ostensibly a folk tale that weaves a fascination with death (both Gavaldón's and Mexico's) into a narrative about a poor *campesino* desperate for something beyond the daily grind of back-breaking work and near-starvation. Aside from being Mexico's most successful cinematic export ever, breaking even Fernández's record by gaining a nomination for Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars *and* screening in competition at Cannes, the film was also a hit at the Mexican box office. Although it was based on a novel, which was itself inspired by a Brothers' Grimm story, the film's mythical vision of Mexico was so successful that, according to the critic and filmmaker Ariel Zúñiga, "an anthropologist researching the legends of southern Mexico discovered that the plot of the film had been totally assimilated into the mythology of the region".

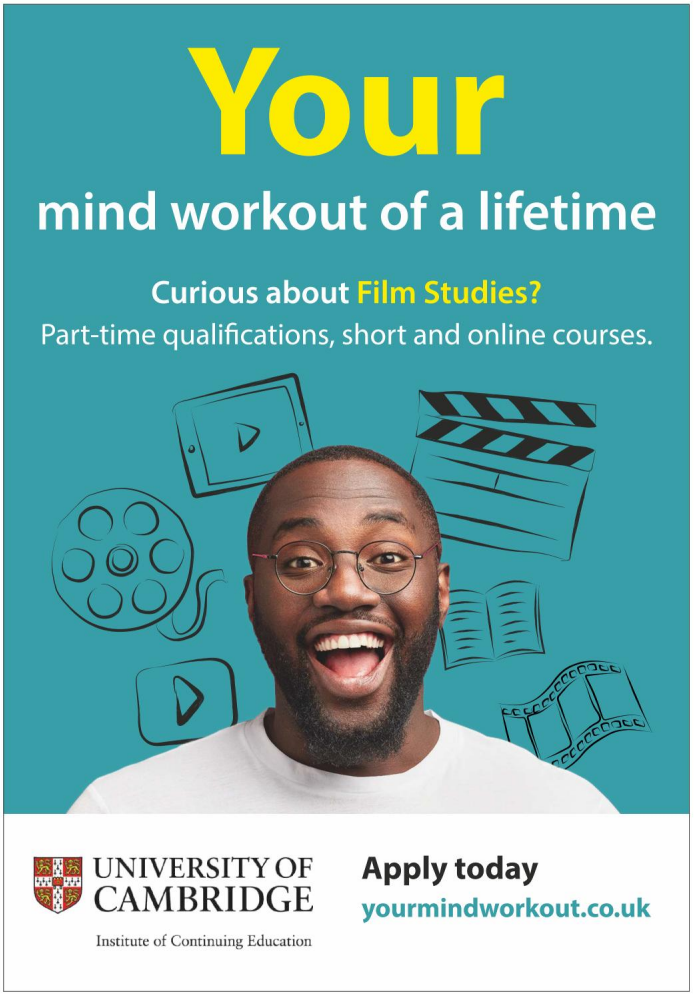
Macario's fictional representation of Mexico and Mexicanness was so popular, then, that it was even assimilated into the country's own oral history, an anecdote that offers a neat example of just how symbiotic the relationship between cinema and cultural identity in Mexico could be. Not only did films made through the Golden Age emerge in response to, or as a reaction against, a constantly shifting set of socio-political and historical circumstances, but the people also looked to these films as examples of how to navigate a complex and confusing new reality, seeking out structures and archetypes that might help them to reidentify themselves as Mexican.

The *Sight & Sound* Deep Focus season 'Salon Mexico: The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema' screens at BFI Southbank, London, throughout July

Days of the dead: Roberto Gavaldón's *Macario* (1960) follows a peasant who makes a pact with Death

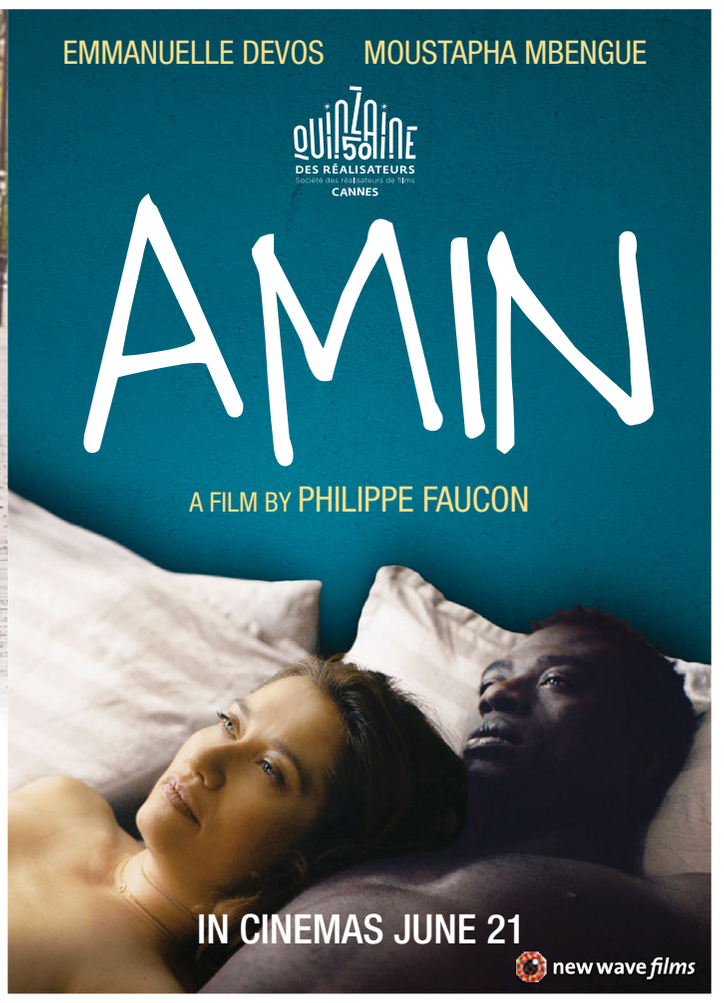

BFI
Film
Forever
Directed by
Robert Siodmak
& Edgar G Ulmer
PEOPLE ON SUNDAY
'SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AHEAD OF ITS TIME'
NEW YORKER
THE WEIMAR CINEMA CLASSIC WITH NEW SCORE BY MÚM
AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE UK
ORDER FROM
BFI SHOP
BFI MEMBERS ENJOY 15% OFF

BFI
Film
Forever
THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE
Sight&Sound
SIGHT & SOUND BINDERS
Keep your issues in tip-top condition
STORES 12 ISSUES
£9.99 (UK)
£11.50 (Europe)
£12.50 (ROW)
Price includes p&p
To order:
Call +44 (0)20 8955 7070
Email sightandsound@abacusemedia.com


Your
mind workout of a lifetime
Curious about Film Studies?
Part-time qualifications, short and online courses.
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Institute of Continuing Education
Apply today
yourmindworkout.co.uk

WINNER
sundance
film festival
"UTTERLY TIMELESS... THIS YEAR'S MOONLIGHT"
Indiewire
"UNCUT GEM OF A MOVIE"
The New York Times
"MESMERISING AND DREAM-LIKE"
The Hollywood Reporter
WE THE ANIMALS
Us three. Us brothers. Us kings, inseparable.
IN CINEMAS AND ON DEMAND
14TH JUNE 2019
#wetheanimals
wetheanimals.co.uk
EUREKA!
montage PICTURES
Twitter: @eurekavideo
Facebook: EurekaEntertainment
Instagram: EurekaEntertainment

★★★★
'A deeply felt, compassionate film'
Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian
PILIFILM PRESENTS
A SEASON IN FRANCE
ERIQ EBOUANEY
SANDRINE BONNAIRE
A FILM BY MAHAMAT-SALEH HAROUN
IN CINEMAS JUNE 14
www.newwavefilms.co.uk


EMMANUELLE DEVOS
MOUSTAPHA MBENGUE
QUINZAINE DES RÉALISATEURS
CANNES
AMIN
A FILM BY PHILIPPE FAUCON
IN CINEMAS JUNE 21
new wave films

Reviews

61 Booksmart

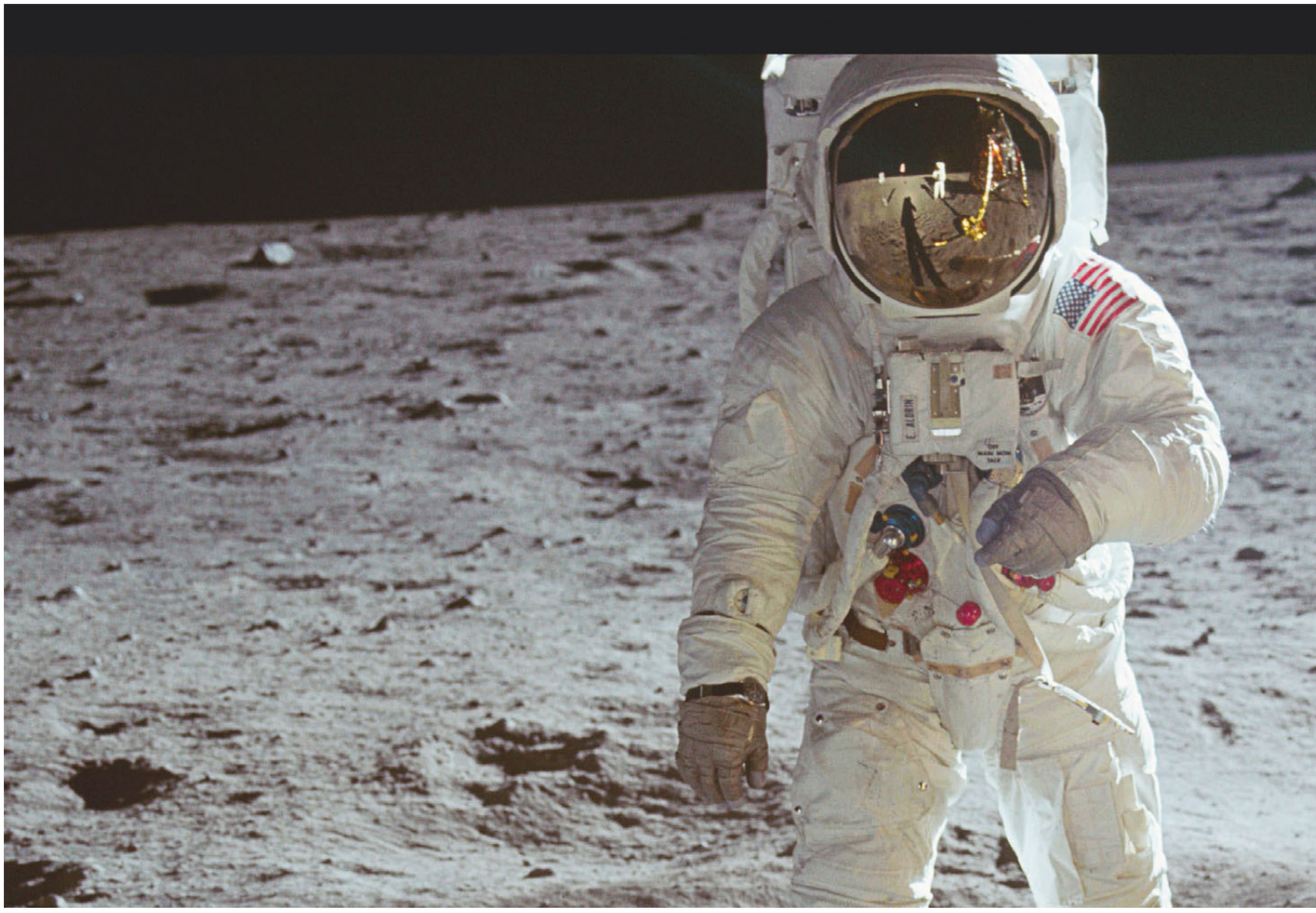
In a long line of teen comedies mostly set over the course of one evening, and which thus have 'America Graffiti' in their DNA, 'Booksmart' celebrates the intimacy of women's closest early friendships while acknowledging their transience

50 Films of the Month

58 Films

82 Home Cinema

90 Books



Fly me to the moon: Todd Douglas Miller's tense documentary uses Nasa archive footage to explore the 1969 lunar landings

Apollo 11

USA 2019
Director: Todd Douglas Miller
Certificate U 93m 3s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

As the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing approaches, Todd Douglas Miller's remarkable feature documentary underlines how the tired tropes of our current visual culture have essentially diminished the wonder and romance of Apollo 11's achievement. To millions of worldwide television viewers at the time, Neil Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" represented the pinnacle of human technological achievement, but nowadays the apparent dead end of lunar exploration has seen the landing compartmentalised as a retro nostalgia trip, reduced to a familiar audiovisual formula. Cue the sights and sounds of the Saturn V rocket counting down to fiery blast-off, the image of Earth's blue-and-green globe hanging in the stars, and the overfamiliar grainy black-and-white TV coverage of those first steps. Add a vintage pop hit of your choice, and a singular chapter of the 20th century becomes a readily digestible YouTube clip. Thankfully, *Apollo 11* resists the short-attention-span snippet-isation of the past by allowing us to access the mission as an unfolding present-tense experience. As eye-catching as any FX-driven sci-fi spectacular, it returns an authentic sense of wonderment to the cinema, doing so through a combination of its specific formal qualities and how they relate to the celluloid iconography of space exploration – Stanley Kubrick, after all, put men on the moon before Nasa ever did.

Miller's key decision is to keep (just about) everything in the here and now. That means no interviews with the astronauts reflecting on the mission, no expository narration supplying extra gravitas, no expert analysis putting everything into historical context. The pictures themselves become the story, as glowing 65mm footage, shot by Theo Kamecke for a Nasa-sponsored feature doc (eventually released as 1971's *Moonwalk One*), provides glorious widescreen colour footage of the Cape Canaveral launch site, mission control and assembled multitudes watching across the bay. Inside launch control, a memorable reverse track past ranks of hulking computers spewing printouts returns us to an era of IT infancy, making the whole undertaking seem positively miraculous from the vantage point of our smartphone age. The overwhelming preponderance of white faces among Nasa's personnel and the gathered crowds brings a time-travel effect too; but without editorialising commentary, we're left to find our own take on what we're watching, an increasingly immersive response as the eight-day moon mission follows its course.

Eschewing the obvious, Miller underplays the countdown sequence, but even more striking is the alternative view of the very first steps on the moon's surface. Instead of the iconic TV images that were transmitted to the waiting world, here we get 16mm camera footage shot by Buzz Aldrin looking out of the lunar lander's window to follow Armstrong's legs down the ladder. Seeing what the astronauts were themselves seeing gives so much of the film a sense of direct unfiltered experience, putting the viewer inside ongoing events in a way that rescues the material from the usual documentary display case. Instead of taking us on a museum visit, Miller restores the full-throttle risk and excitement of the venture.

That sense of being there is, of course, an elaborate construct, derived from the incredible research and editing skills involved in working through thousands of hours of footage and audio recordings. Nasa retained every single second of radio transmission between ground control and the Apollo crew, and selected moments have now been remixed into a highly effective running commentary. Intermittent inserts of simple but telling line-drawn graphics (following the example of Kamecke's pioneering effort)

Instead of taking us on a museum visit, Todd Douglas Miller restores the full-throttle risk and excitement of the Apollo 11 moon landing

Rocket man: Buzz Aldrin shot some of the 16mm footage of the moon included in the film

also outline the overall design, including the trans-lunar injection, whereby a rocket boost allowed the command module to escape Earth's orbit and align in lunar orbit. Once we're on board with the overall men-on-a-mission plan, onscreen graphics list fuel and velocity readings, so that the build-up to the moon landing itself becomes a seat-of-the-pants highlight. We all know they're going to make it, but with fuel rapidly diminishing, the surface looming at high speed and multiple system alarm warnings sounding, tension levels hit the red zone.

It's all about giving us enough information to be able to process the life-threatening immediacy of the situation. To be right there inside this modest tin can as it's hitting 25,000 miles an hour on re-entry, seeing flames coming off the heat shield and licking around the window, is truly a moment of white-knuckle intensity. It looks just like the re-entry sequence in Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013), but this stuff is real – and as such it's a primal reminder of the transporting power of the film medium itself. It certainly shows how Damien Chazelle was on the right lines in privileging the sensory impact of space travel in his detailed reconstruction of the same events in last year's *First Man*, though that film's psychological portraiture is dialled down here.

Flash-cut montages sketch in the backgrounds of crew members Armstrong, Aldrin and Michael Collins (the one who stayed in lunar orbit while the other two landed). Onboard film footage and a continuing audio feed show us good-humoured, focused professionals doing the job they have long trained for. Maybe we don't really get to know these guys, but the thrust of the piece is less about entering into their psyches than about coming away with our own audiovisual experience of the mission. It's surely the most imaginatively enveloping lunar exploration documentary to date. With their nuanced, engrossing and at times surprising retrospective interviews from the astronauts themselves, both Al Reinert's *For All Mankind* (1989) and David Sington's *In the Shadow of the Moon* (2007) remain valuable offerings in their own right, but they aren't able to exploit the full widescreen splendour of the 65mm footage shot on the ground, or the incredible contrast between white powdery surface, deep black space and gleaming gold visors that we see in the astronauts' large-format stills, newly digitised here.

This is far from the usual scissors-and-paste archive assembly, but rather the result of years of maniacal attention to detail, involving transporting priceless original negatives from Nasa's Washington storage facilities to the doc's production base in New York, where an 8K digital scanner moved the film stock on a bed of compressed air to avoid even touching it. This level of dedication extends to Matt Morton's score, created on an early-model Moog synthesiser and other vintage audio gear, to provide an analogue throb that sustains the film's onward momentum – even if it doesn't quite muster the celestial bliss of Brian Eno's classic soundtrack to *For All Mankind*.

Dedicated jointly to Reinert and Kamecke, both of whom passed away during the production period, *Apollo 11*'s use of sustained shot duration sets it apart from the majority of contemporary documentary features in thrall to the chopped-up rhythms of international television requirements., and demonstrates how Miller has moved on considerably since the more conventional contours of his previous feature, *Dinosaur 13* (2014). Here, whether or not Miller was inspired by the work coming out of Harvard's Sensory Ethnography Lab, with its interest in the psychological effect of extended filmic observation, you can certainly see the kinship between *Apollo 11* and, say, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel's 2012 documentary *Leviathan*. Still, it's fair to say that the visual poise of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and the highly wound tension of *Gravity* loom large here too.

One spellbinding moment is the prolonged shot, filmed by Collins on board the command module as the lunar lander returns from the surface to dock, slowly and serenely moving towards the camera in a manner that uncannily resembles similar material in *2001*. There, Kubrick convinced us that his detailed miniatures were genuine by holding the image for as long as it would have taken a real spacecraft to complete a similar procedure – so persuasively, indeed, that his efforts sparked the rumour that he'd faked the actual moon landing footage in a secret Nasa studio. *Apollo 11* probably puts that urban legend to bed, though it doesn't alter the fact that our visual reference points for space travel remain undeniably marked out by movie sci-fi. Now that CGI seemingly offers limitless possibilities for movie storytelling, there's a unique frisson in sitting there with a voice in your head whispering, "This isn't a movie, this actually happened." Immersive and experiential, *Apollo 11* sets down a rare and thrilling cinematic challenge, asking us to confront the reality of, well, reality itself.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Todd Douglas Miller
Thomas Baxley
Petersen
Evan Krauss
Cinematography
Michael Collins
Buzz Aldrin
Neil Armstrong
Urs Furrer
Jeri Sopanen
Theo Kamecke
James Allen
Adam Holender
Victor Johannes
Edwin Lynch
Jerry Bray
Bob Bird
Charles Turner
Bob Newman
Bob Harmon
Editor
Todd Douglas Miller
Music
Matt Morton
Sound Design and Mix
Eric Milano

©Moon Collectors LLC
Production Companies
Universal, Neon, CNN Films, Statement Pictures

Executive Producers
Amy Entelis
Courtney Sexton
John Braun
Tom Quinn

In Colour [2.20:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

The July 1969 Apollo 11 mission and first moon landing are captured in this documentary, made up of material shot and recorded at the time. Nasa's 65mm footage has been combined with 16mm film and large-format photographs shot by the crew themselves inside the lunar module and on the moon. Ground-control communications recorded for posterity offer a running commentary throughout, from take-off and Earth and lunar orbit to the moon landing and subsequent re-entry, bringing to life the exhilaration and anxiety involved in putting together a high-stakes mission at the very edge of available technology. President John F. Kennedy's famous 1961 speech calling on the US to land a man on the moon frames this record of historic events.

Sleight of hand: Diego Maradona in Asif Kapadia's fascinating documentary portrait of the rise and fall of the Argentinian footballing genius

Diego Maradona

United Kingdom 2019
Director: Asif Kapadia
Certificate 12A 129m 46s

Reviewed by Lou Thomas

Diego Maradona is best known for his fraudulent first goal in the Argentina vs England 1986 World Cup quarter-final in Mexico City, a tournament Argentina went on to win. After the match, he admitted that his handball had been scored "a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God". The 'hand of God' goal instantly became infamous – but the second goal Maradona scored that day, after he'd shimmied and feinted his way past a capable but spellbound England team as casually as if he was lacing up his boots in the changing room, was evidence of what his fellow Argentinians prefer to remember: the breathtaking talent that made him the greatest footballer of his generation.

In Asif Kapadia's documentary about the diminutive midfielder, both sides of Maradona's mercurial personality are explored: the cheat and the genius. As with so many flawed stars of entertainment, sporting or otherwise, the feeling persists that the one can't exist without the other. The film's primary focus is the period between July 1984 and April 1991, beginning when a 23-year-old Maradona left FC Barcelona to join SSC Napoli and concluding with his ignominious departure from the Italian club. During this career-peak period, we witness his footballing triumphs (including Mexico '86) and apparent familial happiness, but are also kept keenly aware of his tribulations. Indulging in marital infidelity and fathering an illegitimate son, while being manipulated by the Mob and getting addicted to the cocaine they supply you, may seem like fairly predictable narrative developments, but the telling of Maradona's story is thrilling nevertheless.

Kapadia, assisted by the scalpel-precise cutting of editor Chris King, introduces the narrative with urgency. There's a deafening hullabaloo when Maradona arrives in Naples, where some 75,000 paying fans pack the San Paolo stadium just to see him do kick-ups. When a journalist at the press conference asks if the Camorra crime syndicate was involved with the signing, he is ejected by incandescent Napoli president Corrado Ferlaino. Interviewed later in the film,

Ferlaino doesn't explain how Naples, a city drowning in debt, was able to afford the world's then most expensive footballer for (a now paltry) £6.9 million. (As it happened, politician Vincezo Scotti used banking connections to secure the club a loan.) It's an auspicious, impactful opening that sets the pervading tone of wild excitement and high stakes.

Over the next two hours and six and a half seasons, we meet Maradona the footballer and Maradona the playboy. He turns Napoli into a title-winning team for the first time in their history with an ability and drive that still astound, and he quickly becomes a hero in Naples, wildly fêted everywhere he goes. Comparisons with Barcelona's Lionel Messi, the pint-sized Argentinian goal-scorer whom many consider to be the greatest footballer of the 21st century, are fair – except that Messi hasn't been able to win a World Cup with Argentina. It's also impossible to imagine Messi having such a retrospective documentary made about him in 30 years' time: there simply isn't the player access today. The game has changed immeasurably and players are kept on a tight leash by clubs and agents, while sponsorship money rolls in. Conversely, when players do misbehave, phone-recorded video footage is likely to make its way online via social media, one problem Maradona didn't have.

Who can resist scenes of Maradona teaching his toddler daughter to swear at Milan or Juve fans, or his dad grilling meat for the World Cup squad?

We hear and see how hated Napoli were by opposing teams in other Italian cities. Banners from Juventus and Verona fans brand them as "the unwashed", "the shame of Italy" and "peasants". Napoli 'ultra' Gennaro Montuori, a friend of Maradona and a contributor here, would have been an ideal person to give a detailed fan's perspective of this tension in the stands, but the matter is only touched on. Some of the copious on-pitch action could have made way.

The comedown begins in the film's second half, when Maradona's cocaine habit is discussed in earnest. He says, "I would come home high on drugs, and when I saw my daughters I would be afraid. I would lock myself in the bathroom." Maradona explains how throughout his time in Naples, he would inaugurate businesses for the Camorra in exchange for them supplying him with cocaine. Earlier in the film, local boss Carmine Giuliano is shown in photographs with him, having evidently exploited the footballer's fame since his arrival in the city.

Similarities exist between *Diego Maradona* and Kapadia's two previous superstar documentary features, *Senna* (2010) and *Amy* (2015). Kapadia, King, producer James Gay-Rees and composer Antônio Pinto have collaborated on each part of this unofficial trilogy and each film has great breadth and no shortage of ambition. The earlier portraits of Brazilian Formula One driver Ayrton Senna and singer Amy Winehouse are definitive in part because of their wide array of personal and public visual archive sources and fresh, extensive offscreen audio interviews with all the key people who knew them. The same approach is used here. Maradona's ex-wife Claudia Villafañe and Cristiana Sinagra, mother of his illegitimate son, give proceedings mild prurient curiosity and occasional moments of warmth; trainer Fernando Signorini and Maradona's biographer Daniel Arcucci fill us in on football and partying; and historian John Foot provides socio-political context. This time round, though, Kapadia has an added trump card: the subject is living and has allowed himself to be interviewed – and had a 500-hour treasure chest of archive footage waiting to be plundered. Who can resist scenes of Maradona teaching his toddler daughter to swear into a microphone at Milan and Juve fans, or his dad grilling slabs of meat for the Argentinian World Cup squad?

While Kapadia's film is a fascinating doc and essential viewing for football fans, it's slightly hindered by the relative paucity of genuinely surprising input among the wealth of material from its charismatic subject and other contributors. Yes, Maradona is open about his drug use and speaks movingly about his poverty-stricken upbringing in a shack in the slums of Buenos Aires. But we could have heard more on the 1986 England and Argentina rivalry coming so soon after the Falklands War, and the tough social conditions in Naples when he lived there.

One of the strengths of Kapadia's film is how it impresses on viewers the extraordinary pressures Maradona faced. From the age of 15, he supported his family, including seven siblings, with the proceeds of his talent, and as his career progressed he also shouldered the hopes of a club, a nation and, to some extent, the wishes of the Camorra. The material assembled elicits a degree of sympathy for the player and the man, without ever becoming hagiographic. He has to deal with incessant intrusion and relentless expectation; the parallels between the lack of privacy afforded, say, Hollywood stardom and sporting success are clear, yet for the years his career was at its zenith, Maradona had it all and didn't shirk his manifold professional responsibilities, even as he lapsed in areas of his home life. We feel that Kapadia wants him to win, and we do too.

The sympathy only goes so far, though. For the chief aim of this intimate and thorough access-all-areas study of a sporting superstar is surely for its audience to live the Diego dream vicariously, without having to devote their lives to footballing excellence or open any restaurants for the Mob. Kapadia and his team achieve this in spades, with an adrenalised and substantial film. No one stays at the top for ever, but what a life it looks like when you're inhaling that rarefied air.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Gay-Rees
Paul Martin
Editor
Chris King
Original Music Composed by/ Original Score Musician
Antônio Pinto
Supervising Sound Editors
Andy Shelley
Stephen Griffiths

©Scudetto Pictures Limited

Production Companies
Presented by Lorton Entertainment
An On the Corner film in association with Film4
Executive Producers
Asif Kapadia
George Pank
Will Clarke
Julian Bird
Bill Bungay

Colour by
Company 3

Subtitles

Distributor
Altitude Film Entertainment

A documentary about Argentinian footballer Diego Maradona, beginning in Naples, Italy, in July 1984, when the new star player is unveiled at SSC Napoli, signing from Barcelona for a world-record £6.9 million. We see Maradona train and play for Napoli for six and half seasons as the team rise up the league and win the 'scudetto' (Italian league title) for the first and second time in their history. He becomes a hero to the people of Naples. In 1986, Maradona leads the Argentina team to World Cup victory in Mexico after controversially scoring a handball goal in the quarter-final against England. While married to Claudia Villafañe, he has an illegitimate son, Diego, with Cristiana Sinagra. Maradona develops a cocaine habit, with the drug evidently supplied to him by the Camorra. Ahead of an Argentina-Italy World Cup semi-final in Naples in 1990, Maradona urges locals to support Argentina rather than Italy, causing anger in Naples and across the country. In January 1991 charges are brought against Maradona for supplying cocaine to prostitutes, leading to a suspended sentence and fine. In April, a failed drug test leaves him facing a year-long ban from football. He leaves Naples the next day but is arrested in Buenos Aires a few weeks later for possession of cocaine.

A coda shows Maradona reuniting with Diego in 2016 after finally admitting the legitimacy of his son.

Dressed to kill: Marianne Jean-Baptiste's Sheila Woolchapel tries on the killer dress in Peter Strickland's smart comic horror

In Fabric

United Kingdom 2018
Director: Peter Strickland

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

As his previous films (*Katalin Varga*, 2009; *Berberian Sound Studio*, 2012 and *The Duke of Burgundy*, 2014) have amply proved, Peter Strickland can do stylishly weird like few other contemporary filmmakers. *In Fabric*, though, pushes the weirdness – and the stylishness – even further than its predecessors, executing a tightrope performance of ludic vitality. Though there are nods to Strickland favourites Dario Argento (whose spirit hovered more explicitly over *Berberian*), George Romero and David Lynch, in its self-mocking archness, verbal extravagance and visual exuberance this is very much a Strickland joint.

Unusually enough for a British director, this fourth outing is Strickland's first feature with a UK setting. Following Hungary, Italy and *Duke of Burgundy*'s somewhere-on-the-continent, we find ourselves in the prosaic town of Thames-Valley-on-Thames (seemingly a parody of Strickland's home town of Reading, where the film was partially shot) at some unspecified point in recent decades: mobile phones are absent, and personal ads are viewed in the local press rather than accessed online. These retro elements enhance the sense of a hermetic and precariously unpredictable world.

Much of the action takes place in and around the local department store of Dently & Soper, whose alienating strangeness makes its equivalent establishment in László Nemes's recent *Sunset* seem drably prosaic by comparison. The saleswomen are clad in voluminous black dresses like Victorian mourners, their nails pointed and scarlet; they address the shoppers using intimidatingly baroque phraseology. "The hesitation in your voice soon to be an echo in the spheres of retail," one of them, Miss Luckmoore (Fatma Mohamed, a regular in Strickland's films) tells potential customer Sheila (Marianne Jean-Baptiste, *Secrets & Lies*), "in apprehensions lie the crevices of clarity." This witchy crew are presided over by Nosferatu-like store boss Mr Lundy (Richard Bremmer), who masturbates, eyes glinting, as he watches them sensually stroking and washing naked mannequins (provided with full pubic hair) in the basement of the store, which they reach by crouching in a dumb waiter that lowers them into the depths.

From this outlandish emporium comes the fatal scarlet dress that not only sends washing machines into suicidal frenzies but brings violent death to anyone who wears it. In the store catalogue, its colour is described, ominously enough, as 'Artery Red' – and the woman who modelled it for that catalogue, we're told, was knocked down and killed on a zebra crossing. Inscribed on its hem are the words (in sort-of-Latin) "You who wear me will know me" – although, sliding surreptitiously under doors, hurling itself violently backwards and forwards on the rail in a closet, or hovering spookily in mid-air like an incubus, it seems anything but knowable. Embroidered in black on the waist of the garment is what appears to be some kind of insect – a deathwatch beetle, perhaps? To enhance the pervading sense of ineluctable doom, Strickland has his horror icon operate at one remove. Unlike the homicidal automobile in John Carpenter's *Christine* (1983) – or indeed that mythical archetype of all fatal garments, the Shirt of Nessus that brought about the death of Heracles – the scarlet dress doesn't do its own killing. Instead, having marked its wearers with a red sign of death, a rash that breaks out on their bodies, it consigns them to violent ends by other means.

Coupled with the store's wordless, fetishistic TV ads and overhead shots of tight-packed customers milling aimlessly or being herded up the stairs by a bevy of hand-clapping black-clad saleswomen, this seems to hint at a satire on consumerism, with shoppers as passive and ultimately doomed victims; but it's never insisted on. Nor do we get a conventional backstory to explain the dress's evil provenance. Instead, Strickland prefers to switch tracks on us, teasingly mixing genre conventions rather as Ben Wheatley (an executive producer on this film) did with his 2013 pseudo-historical phantasmagoria *A Field in England*.

So *In Fabric* – as one might expect from Strickland – is far from presenting itself as a single-minded horror movie. Scripting as well as directing, as on all of his features, Strickland varies the texture by tossing in elements of comedy in a gamut of registers, from light to dark – though, not surprisingly, with a bias towards the latter. There's comedy of extreme awkwardness in the domestic situation that Sheila is forced to endure, where her graceless teenage son Vince (Jaygann Ayeh) has imported his much older and supercilious girlfriend Gwen (Gwendoline Christie), who not only spends hours in the bathroom but seems set on putting Sheila down at every opportunity. Poor Sheila also suffers comedy of embarrassment with her dinner date: the inaptly named Adonis (Anthony Adjekum), a grim, monosyllabic individual who, to her desperate conversation-making bid – "It says in your ad you like laughing. What kind of things?" – responds tersely, "Funny things."

We also get episodes of absurdist comedy, especially in the scenes featuring Julian Barratt and Steve Oram as Stash and Clive, joint managers at Waingel's bank, where Sheila works, who keep calling her in to smilingly chide her for misdemeanours such as an insufficiently meaningful handshake. They helpfully suggest she might like to correct this fault with some role playing, for which "we have a range of costumes we could try out". ("The Waingel's Wavelength – The 19 Concepts of Transactioneering" reads a would-be inspirational poster in the branch.)

With the departure of Jean-Baptiste's sympathetic Sheila just over midway through, the film loses a little traction; but Leo Bill's woefully put-upon washing-machine repairman Reg Speaks, to whom the narrative focus shifts, serves as a suitably predestined successor-victim, and has a line in recondite professional jargon that bids fair to rival Miss Luckmoore's. "All that tension on the belt is creating havoc with the washers on the clutch shaft," he tells a customer, trying to deflect her predatory designs on him, "and the plungers are no longer fitting into the wig-wags..."

At repeated intervals, rapid montages of urban stills punctuate the action, accompanied by frenetic electronic thrumming and percussion riffs (from Tim Gane of avant-garde retro band Cavern of Anti-Matter) that enhance the sense of hysteria underlying the whole enterprise. At other times, the sound design incorporates a low-level hubbub of eager voices seemingly emanating from the excited shoppers bargain-hunting in Dently & Soper's sale. Meanwhile, Ari Wegner's camera prowls and lurks ominously in the shadowed corners of the elaborately conceived sets, as if emulating the voyeuristic Mr Lundy. As he did with *Duke of Burgundy*, which listed 'Human Toilet Consultant' among its crew, Strickland can't resist a provocative end credit; here it's for 'Mannequin Pubic Hair'.

Altogether *In Fabric* treads an intricate and devious path. Like a skilled acrobat, it taunts us by letting us think, every so often, that it's about to lose its balance and topple over, but always recovers with a knowing grin of complicity. In its gleeful sadism and self-conscious verbal and visual overkill, the film might risk being written off as a display of style over substance. But style as confidently thought through, inventive and accomplished as this is an impressive – and thoroughly diverting – achievement, and deserves to be appreciated for its own sake. S

Like a skilled acrobat, 'In Fabric' taunts us by letting us think, every so often, that it's about to lose its balance, but always recovers with a knowing grin

A stitch in time: Jean-Baptiste's Sheila Woolchapel

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Andy Starke
Written by Peter Strickland
Cinematography Ari Wegner
Editing by Mátyás Fekete
Production Design Paki Smith
Music Cavern of Anti-Matter
Sound Recording Rob Entwhistle
Costumes Jo Thompson

©Rook Films Fabric Ltd, The British Film Institute and British Broadcasting Corporation

Production Companies BFI and BBC Films present in association with Head Gear Films, Metrol Technology and Twickenham Studios a Rook Films production in association with Blue Bear Film & TV Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers Ian Benson, Ben Wheatley, Stephen Kelliher, Hilary Davis, Andrew Boswell, Phil Hunt, Compton Ross, Lizzie Francke, Rose Garnett

Cast

Marianne Jean-Baptiste Sheila Woolchapel
Hayley Squires Babs
Leo Bill Reg Speaks
Julian Barratt Stash
Steve Oram Clive
Gwendoline Christie Gwen
Barry Adamson Zach
Jaygann Ayeh Vince
Richard Bremner Mr Lundy
Terry Bird Bananas Brian
Fatma Mohamed Miss Luckmoore
Anthony Adjekum Adonis Jackson

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Curzon Artificial Eye

The provincial town of Thames-Valley-on-Thames, some time in the past 40 years or so. Sheila Woolchapel, a middle-aged bank clerk separated from her husband and left with a stroppy teenage son, Vince, has arranged a blind date via the personal ads. To prepare for it, she visits Dently & Soper's department store, which is holding its January sale, to buy a new dress. Saleswoman Miss Luckmoore talks her into buying a glamorous scarlet number. Sheila wears it for her date, but the man she meets, Adonis Jackson, is grim and taciturn. At home, removing the dress, she finds that she has a rash on her breast. She washes the dress; the washing machine goes into a deranged spin and shakes itself apart. Sheila's next date, with Zach, goes much better, but walking in a park with him she is attacked by a dog. The dress is strangely unharmed; she tries to return it to the store. Driving to visit Zach, she is killed in a car crash.

Reg Speaks, a washing-machine repairman, is marrying his long-term girlfriend Babs. One of his friends, Bananas Brian, buys the scarlet dress from a charity shop; Reg is bullied into wearing it at his stag party. Reg develops a rash on his chest – as does Babs when she wears the dress. When they try to wash it, their washing machine is also ruined. Reg repairs it, but is sacked from his company for fixing his own machine. Babs visits Dently & Soper's sale. While she is there, a fight breaks out between two customers and in the chaos the store burns down. Babs, trapped in a changing room, dies in the fire. At home, Reg lies in a stupor as the gas boiler is about to explode. In the burnt wreckage of the store, the red dress lies unharmed.

Paradis lost: porn director Anne is brilliantly played by Vanessa Paradis in Yann Gonzalez's *giallo*-inspired tale of a serial killer on the rampage

Knife+Heart

France/Mexico/Switzerland 2018
Director: Yann Gonzalez
Certificate 18 102m 19s

Reviewed by Alex Davidson

The first of many murders in Yann Gonzalez's *Knife+Heart* is committed before the title card appears. A young man called Jean-Marie goes home with a masked stranger he meets in a gay club. Tied face down on a bed, he is stripped naked, but S&M turns murderous when his pick-up whips out a weapon and stabs him to death. Everything conceals and deceives in the scene. The killer hides his face, while the murder weapon masquerades as a sex toy. Even the victim goes by two different aliases – Jean-Marie may be his real name but his friends call him 'Karl', the name he uses on screen for his career as a porn actor. Soon, many of the other actors in his last film will also fall prey to the serial killer.

This grisly opening sequence echoes a very similar scene in William Friedkin's deeply flawed yet luridly compelling *Cruising* (released in 1980, the year after *Knife+Heart* is set), a film that wallows in sleaze and sensationalises gay male experience. Despite its comparable subject matter, *Knife+Heart* is far more interested in the lives of its queer characters, who are given centre stage, and who include lesbians and trans women.

The allusion to *Cruising* is one of several references to steamy thrillers that appear in Gonzalez's film. The murder sequences knowingly channel Dario Argento and Lamberto Bava. Gonzalez gleefully parodies 1970s gay pornos (the film-within-a-film, shot on 16mm, is immaculately titled *Anal Fury* in its first incarnation) and pays homage to the slick sheen of Brian De Palma's slasher-thrillers – although, unlike the latter, in *Knife+Heart* the sex murderer claims mostly male victims, while it is hinted that the perpetrator might be female. *Knife+Heart* may be set in the late 1970s, but it bathes in the gorgeous aesthetics of 1980s *Cinéma du look* – though there is plenty of substance underneath Gonzalez's impressive sense of style.

While most of the characters are gay men, the protagonist, played tremendously by Vanessa Paradis, is Anne, a porn-movie director based on a real-life erotic filmmaker who was in love with her editor. From her explosive entrance, howling drunkenly, manipulatively, down the phone to her ex-lover Loïs (Kate Moran), to her ruthless attitude towards the gruesome demises of her cast members, where completing the film trumps any emotional connection to these former employees, Anne's actions are invariably self-serving, and she is referred to by a colleague as a "monster". She is impressively unfazed by those who disapprove of her. While Sharon Stone's Catherine flipped the power dynamic of her police interrogation through her sexuality in *Basic Instinct* (1992) Anne goes one step further, queering and eroticising

The end of the affair: Paradis and Kate Moran's Loïs

her police interview in her latest porno in a hilarious sequence that ends with one of the detectives thrusting into his typewriter. Anne's emotional pain at the ending of her relationship with Loïs, and her subsequent jealousy when the latter takes another lover, coincides with the murders, and she and the killer seem at times to be subliminally connected. She is even unmasked as the killer in an early cut of her own ridiculous porn film, hastily retitled *Le Tueur homo* (full marks to the English subtitler for translating this as *Homocidal*) to cash in on the notoriety.

After the sex and violence of the first half, *Knife+Heart* switches tone and enters the realm of myth and fantasy, as the discovery of black feathers near each corpse inspires Anne to play detective, leading her on a journey through a legendary forest to try to solve the mystery. The natural world is both reassuring and menacing, with a mythical blackbird (a throwback to Argento) alerting the audience to imminent violence, and a (clearly fake) thunderstorm beckoning yet another killing. Gonzalez hints at tensions between urban and rural areas, central to the popularity of certain current political movements in France. Anne unconsciously provokes a yearning for the wildness of the city in Cathy, a woman living in the countryside who aids her in her mission (a beautifully judged performance from Romane Bohringer), to the disgust of the latter's oppressive father.

Gonzalez's film is the latest in a line of erotic French films focusing on the serial murders of gay men over the past decade, following *American Translation*, *Our Paradise* (both 2011) and *Stranger by the Lake* (2013), all of which home in on the killers and those who are attracted to them, rather than their victims and the people who knew them. While many of the characters who end up as corpses in *Knife+Heart* may not be fully developed, with the set-piece nature of their slaughter overriding any real tragedy, they are at least named, and their absence is deeply felt by those in the community who cared about them.

Call of duty: Nicolas Maury's porn star Archie with Paradis

Knife+Heart is one of three French films that competed for the Queer Palm at Cannes last year (the winner was Lukas Dhont's controversial drama *Girl*). The other two, Christophe Honoré's *Sorry Angel* and Camille Vidal-Naquet's excellent *Sauvage* (whose star, Félix Maritaud, plays one of the porn actors here), also explore attitudes towards queer sexuality, but *Knife+Heart* is both the least erotic and the most celebratory of gay sex – here, shame is seen as the destructive force. Set a few years before the Aids crisis completely changed the porn industry and the way gay men were forced to exist, Gonzalez's film is haunted by a premonition of the virus, demonstrating how homophobia through indifference was already prevalent. The first two murder victims are defined in the film, respectively, by their promiscuity and their drug use, behaviours exploited by homophobes in an attempt to criticise and other queer people when they were at their most vulnerable. A sympathetic policeman admits to Anne that solving the case is not a priority, a sentiment echoed by institutional indifference towards the multitudes of gay men killed by Aids-related illnesses. At a key moment in *Knife+Heart*, a group of gay men rise up against a common foe, demonstrating how community action would be utilised to spread awareness and effect change through groups such as Act Up. Solidarity against the oppressor is key to survival.

Yann Gonzalez gleefully parodies 1970s gay pornos and pays homage to the slick sheen of Brian De Palma's slasher-thrillers

Like Pedro Almodóvar, Gonzalez has a deep affection for the flawed outsider. Not many other directors would make Anne – a callous, violent, selfish woman – their protagonist, yet Gonzalez and Paradis turn her into a compelling and ultimately courageous antihero. Two outrageously flamboyant gay men – porn star Archie (Nicolas Maury) and oral fluffer 'Bouche d'or' (Pierre Pirol) – get the greatest share of the comedy and emerge as the most sympathetic characters, who feel the loss of their marginalised fellow workers the most acutely. Gonzalez's previous feature, *You and the Night* (2013), a queer fantasy populated with extreme outsider characters referred to by a 'type' rather than their names ('The Star', 'The Stud', 'The Slut'), played a neat trick with a last-minute volte-face, topping an hour and a half of weirdness, kink and camp with an unexpectedly moving ending. The superior *Knife+Heart* also climaxes in a surreal moment of ecstasy, with a gorgeous end-credits sequence accompanied by synth music by M83 (the group's driving force, Anthony Gonzalez, is the director's brother), bringing this unique and intriguing mystery to a close with an extraordinary emotional wallop.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Charles Gillibert
Written by
Yann Gonzalez
Cristiano Mangione
Director of Photography
Simon Beaufils
Editor
Raphaël Lefèvre
Art Director
Sidney Dubois
Original Music
M83
Sound
Jean Barthélémey Velay
Damien Boitel
Xavier Thieulin
Costume Designer
Pauline Jacquard

©CG Cinéma, Piano, Garidi Films, Arte France Cinéma

Production Companies
CG Cinéma presents in co-production with Piano, Garidi Films, Arte France Cinéma, RTS - Television Suisse Romande
With the participation of Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Arte France, Canal+
With the support of Ciclic, Région Centre-Val de Loire in partnership with CNC, Eficine 189
In association with Memento Films Distribution, Kinology, Cofina 14
A CG Cinéma production
In co-production with Le Fresnoy, Studio National des Arts Contemporains
With the support of la Procirep and l'Angoa, Interceramic, SMH, Cinéimage 11 Développement, Soficinéma 13 Développement, Indéfilms Initiative Développement

Cast

Vanessa Paradis
Anne
Nicolas Maury
Archibald, 'Archie'
Kate Moran
Loïs
Jonathan Genet
Guy
Khaled Alouach
Nans/Fouad
Félix Maritaud
Thierry
Noé Hernandez
José
Thibault Servière
Misia
Bastien Waultier
Jean-Marie, 'Karl'
Bertrand Mandico
François
Jules Ritmanic
Rabah
Pierre Pirol
Bouche d'or
Dourane Fall
Fabio
Romane Bohringer
Cathy

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
MUBI

French theatrical title
Un couteau dans le cœur
Onscreen English subtitle title
Knife + Heart

Paris, 1979. A gay male porn star working on a new film is murdered by a masked stranger. The film's director, Anne, is struggling to cope with the end of her romantic relationship with Loïs, her editor. Anne persuades Nans, a builder, to appear in her film. She sees Loïs kissing another woman; simultaneously, another of her actors is killed. Anne reimagines the film, now named 'Homocidal', so that it depicts re-enactments of the crimes.

Loïs shares a passionate moment with Anne, before walking away. Another actor from the film is killed nearby. Later that evening, Anne, in a state of distress, assaults Loïs.

A police tip-off eventually leads Anne to a family living in the countryside. She learns that, years ago, a young man named Guy and his lover Hicham apparently perished in a fire, though Guy's body was never found.

Anne starts work on a new film. Loïs is alarmed when she sees a figure behind Anne in the rough footage of 'Homocidal', and rushes to the film set. The murderer kills another actor; when Loïs arrives, she too is fatally stabbed. Anne visits a gay porn cinema to see 'Homocidal', with Nans in the audience. A facially disfigured man, revealed to be Guy, mistakes Nans for Fouad, one of Anne's former regular actors, and follows him to the cinema's dark room. Anne sees a trailer for one of her old films, which bears a close resemblance to the fate of Guy and Hicham, and which stars all the murder victims, as well as Fouad, who plays a role similar to Hicham. Realising that Nans is in danger, she alerts the clientele that the killer is in the building. Guy is killed by the audience members.

Aladdin

USA 2019
Director: Guy Ritchie
Certificate PG 127m 48s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The Disney ethos has always involved frequent returns to the Cave of Magical Treasures to polish up dusty old lamps and release genies of unending profit. This latest *Aladdin* is another in the company's series of live-action remakes of cartoon properties farmed out to semi-interesting auteurs (Jon Favreau's *The Jungle Book*, Tim Burton's *Dumbo*). It is also, as with *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*, a third stab at a property that has had an interim run as a stage musical. *Maleficent* (2014), first of the live-action 'reimaginings', was a *Wicked*-influenced telling of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) from the viewpoint of the story's villain – an approach abandoned here in favour of doing the same script again with expeditious trims (a contentious lyric about ear-cutting has been lost from the 'Arabian Nights' song) and low-wattage supporting casting around a would-be showstopping star turn.

The cartoon *Aladdin* (1992), directed by John Musker and Ron Clements, owed a great deal to Alexander Korda's version of *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), to the extent of borrowing its villain (Conrad Veidt's sorcerer Jafar) and replacing the 'new lamps for old' business with special-effects sorcery. That debt carries on here, with Will Smith's genie looking and acting more like Rex Ingram in Korda's film than the cartoon voiced by Robin Williams. Though CGI-ed into a blue-skinned, smoke-below-the-waist special effect, Smith – who does double duty as the teller of the tale in a frame sequence – spends much of the film in human form, involved in his own love-interest subplot and breaking several of the 'rules' of the story in order to nudge things along to a happy ending. He tells Aladdin (Mena Massoud) that he can't wish for more wishes, yet grants Jafar's wish to become a sorcerer – which, in essence, is the same thing. And he misses a trick when the villain makes a bland statement – "I wish only for glory for the kingdom of Agrabah" – that could easily be counted as one of his wishes.

Massoud's parkour-practising Aladdin and Naomi Scott's glass-ceiling-smashing Princess Jasmine aren't really allowed space to develop readings of the roles when Smith is due to pop out of a lamp at any moment to murder a song or flog a comedy routine. As with Favreau's

Carpet diem: Naomi Scott, Mena Massoud

Mowgli, the casting ethos has advanced to the point where performers with the right skin tones get to play Middle Eastern or Asian characters... but only if their line readings sound straight from 1950s white-bread American suburbia. Even Sabu, as far back as the 1930s, was allowed to have an Indian accent.

Director Guy Ritchie comes to this after putting his own spin on Sherlock Holmes and King Arthur, and is at least invested in the story of a rascally thief and a socially conscious princess. In the meet-cute scene, he has Aladdin and Jasmine feed starving orphans at the expense of an understandably grumpy baker, expressing an aristocrat's preference for twinkling crooks over dull working people that's been part of the Ritchie shtick since the *Lock, Stock* days. Indeed, the smugness of the roguish couple suggests this might have profitably gone the *Maleficent* route and told the story from the viewpoint of a villain who, for all his faults, has actually bothered to run the city.

Given that this story – a Middle Eastern fable set in China, tipped into *The Thousand and One Nights* by a French translator – is unavoidably a riot of cultural appropriation and inappropriate references, Ritchie's staging of the musical numbers with Bollywood moves makes as much sense as anything else. However, his habit of having people stand centre screen and belt out lyrics while grinning is more redolent of the Aladdins that have long been a mainstay of tattier provincial pantomimes. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Dan Lin
Jonathan Eirich
Screenplay
John August
Guy Ritchie
Based on Disney's *Aladdin* [1992], animation screenplay by Ron Clements, John Musker, Ted Elliott, Terry Rossio
Director of Photography
Alan Stewart
Edited by
James Herbert
Production Designer
Gemma Jackson
Score by/ Songs Music
Alan Menken
Lyrics
Howard Ashman
Tim Rice
New Lyrics
Benj Pasek
Justin Paul
Production Sound Mixer
Simon Hayes
Costume Designer
Michael Wilkinson
Choreographer
Jamal Sims
Visual Effects & Animation
Industrial Light & Magic

©Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Production Companies
Disney presents
A Rideback production
A Guy Ritchie film
Executive Producers
Marc Platt
Kevin De La Noy

Cast
Will Smith
Genie/mariner
Mena Massoud
Aladdin
Naomi Scott
Princess Jasmine
Marwan Kenzari
Jafar
Navid Negahban
Sultan
Nasim Pedrad
Dalia
Billy Magnussen
Prince Anders
Numan Acar
Hakim
Alan Tudyk
voice of Iago

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

The Sultanate of Agrabah, centuries ago. Princess Jasmine, bound by law to marry a prince, tours the city in disguise and encounters Aladdin, a quick-witted thief who mistakes her for a handmaiden. Jafar, the sultan's scheming adviser, hires Aladdin to retrieve a magic lamp from a cave of treasures, intending to kill him once he has the prize. However, Aladdin becomes master of the genie of the lamp and uses one of the three wishes the genie grants to become a prince to woo Jasmine. Jafar steals the lamp and uses his wishes to become all-powerful, though this ultimately means that he replaces the genie as the slave of whoever finds the lamp. Aladdin uses his final wish to free the genie, and the law is changed so that Jasmine can marry for love and become ruler of the city.

Ama-San

Portugal/Switzerland/France/Japan 2016
Director: Cláudia Varejão

Reviewed by Ben Nicholson

It is an irony that, in Western culture, the most recognisable example of the Japanese *ama* fisherwomen is Mie Hama's Kissy Suzuki in the 1967 James Bond adventure *You Only Live Twice*. This is not because of the contrast between the depiction of a nubile young Bond girl and the current reality of the small number of Japan's ageing, expert free-diving fisherwomen. Rather it is because, while heritage and legacy may be as vital an element of their identity as it is to the notion of Bond, the *ama*'s social and cultural role is imbued with an ecofeminism that could hardly find a less fitting vessel than 007.

Cláudia Varejão's *Ama-San*, on the other hand, is an entirely apt vessel, perfectly shaped to its subject. In her book *Political Animals: New Feminist Cinema*, Sophie Mayer writes that "reinfusing the sacred and mythopoeic dimensions of water and other ecologies is essential to our survival". Varejão's film seems to take up this challenge, allowing the form and structure of her documentary to reflect the almost folkloric aspect of an otherwise quotidian – and arduous – ancient occupation.

An opening monologue begins with a reference to the ocean in Japanese mythology – where "the depths below are devoid of sound" – and Varejão takes inspiration from this for the film's two most beguiling sequences, in which we see the *ama* diving for spoils – seaweed, shellfish, pearls, abalone – without the aid of oxygen tanks. The sound design throughout the film hews to the natural and diegetic, so under the sea the only things audible are the faint echoes of movement through the gurgling displacement of water, giving the images a serene, almost otherworldly quality. Perhaps atypically for footage of free divers, the camera mostly remains quite close, ignoring potentially spectacular wide shots of figures against a screen full of blue. This means that the intimacy generated elsewhere is not lost in the depths, and the film associates that intimacy – and the ethereality of the setting – with the women's work itself.

It is interesting then to consider *Ama-San* in conjunction with another recent film about fishing. Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor's *Leviathan* (2012) also achieved an incredible intimacy – in that case by utilising GoPro cameras on a commercial trawler – but the results couldn't be more different. Where *Leviathan* intensified the churn of the unforgiving ocean and the grinding mechanics of destructive modern fishing, the atmosphere captured here is more delicate, less obtrusive, and so underlines the comparatively small ecological footprint.

This effect is also emphasised by the fact that *Ama-San* is interested more in *cinéma vérité* observation than anything experiential, like *Leviathan*, or narrative-driven. Apart from the names of three of the divers, the film reveals little about them, despite patiently watching their lives on dry land for most of its running time. Through close camerawork, vignettes of family and friendship offer an intimacy of feeling rather than knowledge. "Can you see what makes me me?" asks the voice in the opening moments, but questions about individual personality such as this one seem to

The dives of others: *Ama-san*

dissipate in the ebb and flow of tender communal cultivation of children and oceanic bounty.

Varejão also tends to concentrate on the dives as collective rituals. While she doesn't shy away from snippets of conversations about the hardships of the work, its economic realities or its dwindling popularity among younger women, the details of pre- and post-dive customs are paramount. In particular, the origami-like wrapping of the headscarf and the donning of the dive mask are seen repeatedly, each woman carefully folding a white cloth around her head before submerging.

After they've come up for air, the fisherwomen reflect on the day's catch, and this is the closest we get to an insight into group dynamics or specific personality traits. Long before Kissy Suzuki in Bond, such moments were the inspiration for Utamaro Kitagawa's 18th-century triptych painting 'The Abalone Fisherwomen', which may have offered Varejão some inspiration. It and other Edo-period artworks helped to immortalise the *ama*, painting them into cultural history. *Ama-San* pays homage to this legacy but also co-opts it into a potential future that manages to feel at once old-fashioned and quietly radical.

Credits and Synopsis

Production
João Matos
Leonor Noivo
Luísa Homem
Pedro Pinho
Susana Nobre
Tiago Hespanha
Photography
Cláudia Varejão
Underwater Camera
Akagi Masakazu
Editing
Cláudia Varejão
João Braz
Sound
Sugimoto Takashi
©Terratreme, Mira Film, Flying Pillow Films
Production Companies
Terratreme Filmes, Mira Film present
Production: Terratreme Filmes
Co-production: Mira Film
In co-production with Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen SRF, SRG SSR - Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, Flying Pillow Films
Financial support: ICA Instituto do Cinema e do Audiovisual, Succès Passage Antenne Vinca Film
In Colour [1.85:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
Koenig Pictures

A documentary about the free-diving fisherwomen known as the 'ama' ('women of the sea'), who hail from the village of Wagu on Japan's Ise peninsula. The 'ama' eschew modern fishing and diving techniques in favour of a traditional method that stretches back millennia. The women plunge to depths of 30 metres to collect seaweed, shellfish, pearls and abalone without the aid of oxygen tanks. Passed from generation to generation, the skill has allowed them to carve out a niche in local society, where ship captains are often reliant on them for their livelihood.

The film unobtrusively observes a series of excursions in the Pacific Ocean. Before they make their dives, the women don neoprene suits and wrap traditional white headscarves over their more modern diving hoods. Back on shore, they discuss their techniques, successes and failures as they survey and prepare their catches. In between diving trips, certain women, particularly Matsumi, Mayumi and Masumi, are seen going about their daily lives: interacting with loved ones; preparing meals; socialising with the other 'ama'; singing at a local karaoke bar; praying for a good haul.

Amin

France 2018
Director: Philippe Faucon

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

An ensemble drama that brings arm's-length politesse to the depiction of tumultuous emotions and life-changing events, *Amin* is a dutiful but oddly bloodless addition to the 'web of life' genre. Moustapha Mbengue plays the eponymous husband and father, who works as a manual labourer in France while his wife and three children remain in his native Senegal. Though Amin is doing well enough to be building his family a new house with the profits from his overseas job, his wife Aïcha (Marème N'Diaye) would prefer to join him in France. The couple discuss this matter, but not the other frustrations that may underlie it: Aïcha is rumoured to be seeing other men, while Amin is in the process of establishing a low-key but intense bond with a client, Gabrielle (Emmanuelle Devos). Meanwhile, the other immigrants with whom Amin works face difficulties of their own, particularly the painfully sweet, dignified and exploited Abdelaziz (Noureddine Benallouche), whose roots and family are in Morocco.

So determinedly tepid is the emotional temperature maintained by writer-director Philippe Faucon that it's a challenge to feel truly involved; and several of the characters we encounter register as embodiments of issues or ways of life rather than complex individuals. There is, however, an advantage to Faucon's mild and muted approach, which is the space that it grants us to notice the detail of Mbengue's splendid central performance. As he slips through a range of personae, behind which the private and essential Amin remains obscure, he demonstrates not only the necessary adaptability of the migrant worker who belongs to multiple homes and serves multiple masters, but also the instability of the black male body as a signifier. To his bosses, Amin is a diligent and capable underling; to his colleagues, a sophisticate who's not averse to packing his socks with euros to deliver to friends and family on his regular trips back to Senegal; to his children, a hero and a virtual stranger; to his lover, a beautiful enigma; and to his wife, a bit of a let-down.

Mbengue plays these differences beautifully: the scenes where he registers the changes in his kids since last he visited are piercingly moving, while his subservient demeanour in conversation with Gabrielle emphasises both their racial power differential and his respect for her. That Faucon keeps the true nature of Amin and Gabrielle's bond enigmatic is unexpected and gratifying. She doesn't shock him with her first-world sophistication; he doesn't blow her mind sexually; she doesn't love him for the dangers he has passed through, nor he love her because she pities him – or not as far as we know. They just find a space in which to temporarily provide for one another; the most we learn is her farewell declaration that "it did me a lot of good".

Moustapha Mbengue

The subtlety of their connection throws into sharp relief the ugliness of Gabrielle's ex-husband's response to hearing of the affair, which is to send her pornographic images of black men with white women. The idea of the most basic facets of male-female relationships being confused and corrupted by globalisation and migrancy is touched on once again when Amin's young colleague Sabri (Jalal Quarriwa) picks up an Algerian prostitute, only to find himself unable to perform with her. Is Sabri's status as an itinerant migrant worker inherently emasculating? Does this young woman's brisk assertiveness and economic independence challenge his traditional views on sex roles? Or is it that what Sabri takes for physical lust – "You have lovely breasts," he tells her – was homesickness for his motherland all along? We may conjure our own interpretations, since the film retains the extreme circumspection that is its greatest weakness and occasional strength.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Philippe Faucon
Written by Philippe Faucon Yasmina Nini-Faucon Mustapha Kharmoudi Based on an original idea by Yasmina Nini-Faucon
Director of Photography Laurent Fénart
Editor Sophie Mandonnet
Set Decorator Manuel Swieton
Original Music Composed by Amine Bouhafa
Sound Recordist Pascal Ribier
Costumes Charlotte David

©Istiqlal Films, Arte France Cinéma, NJJ Entertainment, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, Tanit Films
Production Companies Istiqlal Films presents an Istiqlal Films, Arte France Cinéma, NJJ Entertainment, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, Tanit Films co-production With the participation of CNC - Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Canal+, Ciné+, Arte France, Région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and CNC With the support of Région Île-de-France, Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur in partnership with CNC With the participation of Fonds Images de la Diversité, Commissariat général à l'égalité des territoires, CNC In association with Pyramide Screenplay developed with the support of Fonds Francophone d'aide au développement aided by CNC and with writing support from Région Normandie in partnership with CNC and in association with Normandie Images With the assistance of Association Beaumarchais-SACD With the support of Région Franche-Comté Produced by Istiqlal Films in co-production with Arte France Cinéma, NJJ Entertainment, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, Tanit Films

Cast
Moustapha Mbengue Amin
Emmanuelle Devos Gabrielle
Marème N'Diaye Aïcha
Noureddine Benallouche Abdelaziz
Moustapha Naham Ousmane
Jalal Quarriwa Sabri
Fantine Harduin Célia
Samuel Churin Hervé
Loubna Abidar server lady
Soria Zeroual money transfer agency client

In Colour [1.85:1] Subtitles

Distributor New Wave Films

Present day. Construction workers Amin and Abdelaziz are employed in France. Amin's wife Aïcha and three young children remain in his native Senegal, while Abdelaziz has two grown daughters in Morocco, who fear for his wellbeing and long-term security. Amin returns to Senegal for a visit. Aïcha wants to join him in France, but he discourages her. Back in France, he is employed to work on the house of a divorced mother, Gabrielle; the two begin an affair, which horrifies Gabrielle's hostile and jealous ex-husband. Abdelaziz reluctantly agrees to do some additional work for his landlady and is seriously injured in a fall from her roof. His daughters fly him back to Morocco. Gabrielle and Amin agree to end their relationship. Amin begins another job, on a large construction site.

Avengers Endgame

USA 2019
Directors: Anthony Russo, Joe Russo
Certificate 12A 180m 57s

Fleeing the future: Scarlett Johansson, Jeremy Renner

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In one single snippet of the deft symphony of action and character beats that ends this epic-length Part Two and therefore also a range of storylines carried through multiple films since 2008, Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) aka the Scarlet Witch, deploys considerable psychic firepower against cosmic megalomaniac Thanos (Josh Brolin, augmented via CGI). She complains, "You took *everything* from me," in reference to the death of her android love interest Vision in last year's *Avengers: Infinity War* – only for Thanos to snarl, "I don't even know you!"

Her comeback ("You will!") is suitably defiant – if lifted from another universe (it's a key Batman line in Frank Miller's graphic novel *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, sadly thrown away by Ben Affleck in 2016's *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*). But Thanos won't be the only one who has a problem keeping up. Several old friends and foes definitively killed in previous films pop in for cameos that require an acute memory of what went down in *Thor: The Dark World* (2013) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) – all before mass resurrection gets the entire orchestra back together for a last-reel battle that pretty much has to be the most satisfying superhero movie set piece of all time, delivering the multiple closures this long-in-the-telling saga needs. The reason for the villain not knowing his own backstory is that, at this point, Wanda is facing Past Thanos, who has hopped to a time after his death to get his derailed universe-triaging scheme back on track but has only fragmentary knowledge (from one minor player's point of view) of what the hell is going on.

The downer ending of last year's *Infinity War*, where the bad guy gets his way and sits happily in a field after wiping out half the universe, is

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Kevin Feige
Screenplay Christopher Marcus Stephen McFeely Based on the Marvel comics by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby
Director of Photography Trent Opaloch
Edited by Jeffrey Ford Matthew Schmidt
Production Designer Charles Wood
Music Alan Silvestri
Supervising Sound Editors Shannon Mills Daniel Laurie
Costume Designer Judianna Makovsky
Visual Effects and Animation Industrial Light & Magic Weta Digital Limited Digital Domain 3.0 RISE | Visual Effects Studios
Visual Effects Framestore Dneg Cinesite Iola | VFX Cantina Creative
Stunt Co-ordinator Monique Ganderton

©Marvel
Production Companies Marvel Studios presents Distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures
Executive Producers Louis D'Esposito Victoria Alonso Michael Grillo Trinh Tran Jon Favreau James Gunn Stan Lee

Cast
Robert Downey Jr Tony Stark, 'Iron Man'
Chris Evans Steve Rogers, 'Captain America'
Mark Ruffalo Bruce Banner, 'Hulk'
Chris Hemsworth Thor
Scarlett Johansson Natasha Romanoff, 'Black Widow'
Jeremy Renner Clint Barton, 'Hawkeye'
Don Cheadle James Rhodes, 'War Machine'
Paul Rudd Scott Lang, 'Ant-Man'
Benedict Cumberbatch Doctor Strange
Chadwick Boseman T'Challa, 'Black Panther'
Brie Larson Carol Danvers, 'Captain Marvel'
Tom Holland Peter Parker, 'Spider-Man'
Karen Gillan Nebula
Zoe Saldana Gamora
Evangeline Lilly Hope Van Dyne, 'Wasp'
Tessa Thompson Valkyrie
Rene Russo Frigga
Elizabeth Olsen Wanda Maximoff, 'Scarlet Witch'
Anthony Mackie Sam Wilson, 'Falcon'
Sebastian Stan Bucky Barnes, 'Winter Soldier'
Tom Hiddleston Loki
Tilda Swinton the Ancient One
Josh Brolin Thanos

Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor Buena Vista International (UK)

Alien tyrant Thanos has used six gems of power to wipe out half the life in the universe. The surviving Avengers – Tony Stark (Iron Man), Steve Rogers (Captain America), Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow), Thor and Bruce Banner (the Hulk) – along with Thanos's estranged daughter Nebula and returning hero Carol Danvers (Captain Marvel), trace Thanos to his planetary retreat, but find he has had the gems destroy themselves so that his genocidal work cannot be undone. Thor kills Thanos.

Five years later, Scott Lang (Ant-Man) returns from the quantum realm where he has been stranded and persuades Stark and Rogers that time travel is possible. The Avengers travel back to earlier times to retrieve the stones so that they can be used again.

In the recent past, Nebula's recorded memories are transmitted to her younger self and shared with Thanos – who uses her time-travel device to take an army to Earth in his future, just as the Avengers have restored the dead. An expanded Avengers team battles Thanos, and Stark sacrifices himself to use the gems to destroy the villain. Rogers returns the gems to their proper places, and alters his own timeline for the better.

obviously going to be unpicked – Dr Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) said as much then – so the suspense of *Endgame* is in how long the big comeback can be delayed and who'll sacrifice themselves along the way. For a while, the film genuinely doesn't do the expected. The villain is surprisingly easily defeated early on, but too late to save the day. A five-years-later plot-jump makes a whole section play out like a secular version of the Christian End Times-themed *Left Behind* franchise, as Captain America runs a self-help group for those bereaved by 'the snap', and ace archer Hawkeye turns vigilante in a crusade against all the evil people left alive when his family were taken.

A longstanding problem of series fictions is that characters can only *seem* to change. For decades, the likes of Superman and Archie stayed the same age. In the 1960s, Marvel Comics had Peter Parker graduate from high school and start growing up – but, after a decade, the company froze the situation and everyone has been running on the spot ever since. Of course, film franchises are stuck with actors who age – though CGI helps several here appear younger or older – and so have to mark the passing of time in a way that drawn comics don't. In *Endgame*, Thor, the Hulk and Tony Stark, affected by their losses, are transformed in unexpected ways, affording stars Chris Hemsworth, Mark Ruffalo and Robert Downey Jr the chance to break with their established performances and try new readings – a gone-to-seed Thor nicknamed 'Lebowski', a mellow Hulk embarrassed when circumstances require him to smash something.

There is so much story – so much character – to unpick here that three hours doesn't seem unwieldy, even if the time-travel sequences fall back on the long-out-of-fashion plot structure associated with the early days of superhero team books. The big cast breaks up into smaller groups for individual quests (in the 1940s *Justice Society* book, different artists handled each chapter) before reassembling at the conclusion. Directors Joe and Anthony Russo and screenwriters Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely embed even large-scale action sequences with moments where characters connect (the down-to-earth Spider-Man is always useful for this). Sometimes, what might have been entire movies are compressed into single shots, such as the turn of battle that aligns the female characters into an incarnation of the comics' modish late-60s one-off alternative to macho hero groups, the Lady Liberators.

It's a testament to the film's sure hand with cosmic soap opera that scenes between characters who don't really belong together – the Hulk and Dr Strange's mentor the Ancient One (Tilda Swinton) – are as affecting as the moments where heroes reconnect with dead parents (there's a lot of that going about, as in almost all superhero stories). A key punch-to-the-heart scene, cannily mirroring a plot turn in *Infinity War*, hinges on a relationship established in comics in 1964 but only now getting real airtime in the movies. Perhaps remembering how the last reel of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) ran on and on, this sticks with one big celebratory coda and a time-meddling twist to give key players the endings they deserve. S

Booksmart

USA 2019
Director: Olivia Wilde
Certificate 15 102m 6s

Blow-out: Beanie Feldstein, Kaitlyn Dever

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

In a long line of teen comedies mostly set over the course of one evening, and which thus have *America Graffiti* (1973) in their DNA, *Booksmart* celebrates the intimacy of women's closest early friendships while acknowledging their transience. Whereas the analogous end-of-high-school comedies *Superbad* (2007) and *Blockers* (2018) depict the quests of their respective male and female characters to lose their virginities, actor Olivia Wilde's riotous first feature as director has a comparatively thin premise: it shows the efforts of two best buddies and unpopular super-swots – introspective social activist Amy and ebullient valedictorian Molly – to attend their first party.

Desire ostensibly motivates them. Amy, who's been out for two years but is still a virgin, likes the androgynous skater girl Ryan, while Molly, who's straight, admires gorgeous Nick. Their academic self-closeting, however, has ill equipped them to attract their crushes. Amy, entranced by swimming underwater at Nick's party with Ryan in the film's atypically lyrical centrepiece, deludes herself that she has a chance with her, only to be rudely awakened while she's still in Nick's pool. Molly is similarly disillusioned minutes later. Amy's attempt to make love to Hope, a scathing ex-classmate, goes wrong when she throws up on her.

These tenderly observed, relatable romantic failures, which can be filed away as experience, serve the movie's focus on Amy and Molly's bond. Nothing that happens during the incident-packed evening is more significant than Molly's discovering that Amy has deferred entering Columbia University to spend a gap year volunteering in Botswana, spoiling their plan to take a post-college trip and move to Washington (presumably DC, since Molly aims to be the youngest Supreme Court Justice).

En route to Nick's party, Amy and Molly (drolly played by Kaitlyn Dever and *Lady Bird*'s Beanie Feldstein) run into their former class teacher, who says she'll gladly give them a ride because it saves her from "watching *Gilmore Girls* again". That offhand reference makes clear the debt that *Booksmart* owes to Amy Sherman-Palladino's 2000-07 TV series about the relationship of a go-getting single mother and her academically gifted teenage daughter. Like the show's Lorelai and Rory, Amy and Molly trade in a rapid-fire, pop-culture-infused comic dialogue. Unlike Rory and her high-school and Yale friends, Amy and Molly casually discuss masturbation and lesbian porn (Amy wants tips), and quip about their vaginas, though less graphically than does Amy Schumer in her comedy routines. The film's writers (Katie Silberman and Susanna Fogel reworked Sarah Haskins and Emily Halpern's original script) delight in puncturing taboos about female sexuality. The pungent one-liners need to be heard, not read in a review.

Booksmart's cautious empowerment of its naive twosome doesn't patronise them or promise them the moon, despite Molly's vaunting ambition. The movie is exemplary in its non-issue approach to integrating LGBTQ characters, especially Amy and the loner Hope. Theatre-mad George and his flamboyant boyfriend Alan may be clichéd gay men, but that doesn't make them untruthful. Heteronormativity is represented by Molly's tentative involvements with Nick and another boy, Jared, and by Miss Fine's hook-up with her former student Theo. But testosterone only wells up in a smartphone shot that shows one of Nick's fellow jocks karate-chopping a stack of pizzas. The pizza delivery driver exposed as a strangler is a caricature played for laughs.

Screenplay practice insists that protagonists change, but *Booksmart*'s writers tweak that concept. Amy and Molly only mildly evolve, but key secondary characters do change, or information is revealed that shows them to be other than what they seem. The proudly promiscuous Triple A (her name connoting porn and 2010's *The Scarlet Letter* update *Easy A*) suddenly expresses anxiety about her reputation. Hope's cynicism evaporates when Amy kisses her, suggesting it was motivated by frustration. Jared, a flashy rich boy who fails to impress

women, endears himself to Molly by admitting he's a virgin. His posh friend Gigi may be a Blanche DuBois in training, but she's also sad and loyal, Jared tells Molly. The message is that no one leaves high school fully formed.

Wilde has mounted a sparkling display on the film's modest framework, conjuring memories of Susan Seidelman's *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985). The blend of Jason McCormick's fixed and handheld cinematography, the use of low angles, jump cuts and startling transitions and the pell-mell pacing capture the emotional turmoil underpinning Amy and Molly's hapless adventuring. (The abrasive hip-hop score amps up the sense of disorder.) Wilde's satirical *coup de foudre* is an animated *Toy Story* episode in which Amy and Molly, tripping like crazy, are nightmarishly transformed into big-eyed, large-breasted, Barbie-like dolls, the antithesis of what these smart women want to be. The film's up-to-the-minute consciousness is further expressed in Molly's unfinished line in her graduation speech: "Straight white men, your time is..."

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Megan Ellison
Jessica Elbaum
Katie Silberman
Chelsea Barnard
David Distenfeld
Written by
Katie Silberman
Emily Halpern
Sarah Haskins
Susanna Fogel
Director of Photography
Jason McCormick
Edited by
Brent White
Jamie Gross
Production Designer
Katie Byron
Music
Dan the Automator
Production Sound Mixer
Lisa Pinero
Costume Designer
April Napier

©Biochemistry, LLC
Production Companies
Annapurna Pictures presents in association with Gloria Sanchez Productions
Executive Producers
Will Ferrell
Adam McKay
Jillian Longnecker
Scott Robertson
Alex G. Scott

Cast
Beanie Feldstein
Molly
Kaitlyn Dever
Amy
Jessica Williams
Miss Fine
Lisa Kudrow
Charmaine
Will Forte
Doug
Jason Sudeikis
Principal Brown
Billie Lourd
Gigi
Diana Silvers
Hope
Skyler Gisondo
Jared
Molly Gordon
Triple A
Noah Galvin
George
Austin Crute
Alan
Eduardo Franco
Theo

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

Los Angeles, present day. Best friends Amy and Molly have sacrificed having fun to become the academic stars at Crockett High. Molly is bound for Yale, Amy for Columbia University. On the eve of graduation, they're shocked to learn that several of their hard-partying peers in Miss Fine's class have also got into Ivy League schools. Molly insists they crash that night's party, hosted by Nick, whom she fancies; Ryan, Amy's female crush, will be there too. They are first diverted to a party thrown by Jared on a yacht, where Gigi, his only other guest, gives them drug-steeped strawberries. Via a Lyft ride given by the moonlighting school principal Mr Brown, Amy and Molly land at George's murder-mystery party. Both hallucinate, imagining themselves to be dolls. Rides from a pizza delivery driver and Miss Fine bring Amy and Molly to Nick's. Each sees Nick and Ryan kissing. Amy and Molly fall out. Amy hooks up disastrously with Hope, another ex-classmate. The police raid the party and arrest Amy. The next morning, Molly identifies the pizza delivery driver as the strangler depicted on a police wanted poster, securing Amy's release. Molly kisses Jared at the graduation ceremony; Amy suggests that Hope visit her during her gap year in Botswana. Molly drives Amy to the airport, each saddened by their imminent parting. Amy invites Molly for pancakes.

Brightburn

USA 2019
Director: David Yarovesky
Certificate 15 90m 12s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Brightburn begins with a scene of extraterrestrial immaculate conception straight out of Smallville and ends with a night-flight embrace that's something like a ghoulish parody of the one taken by the Man of Steel and Lois Lane in *Superman* (1978). The premise of the movie, directed by David Yarovesky, written by Mark and Brian Gunn and produced by their relation and *Guardians of the Galaxy* director James Gunn, is an inversion of the Superman story in which the stranger from Krypton fails to develop protective feelings towards his hosts on Earth and instead decides to use his strength, heat vision and catch-me-if-you-can flight speed to become the will-to-power bane of humanity. The idea has been explored by DC Comics in its alternative-universe Ultraman character, but the treatment here is nastier and more committed than anything seen in branded superhero movies, with superkid Brandon Breyer (Jackson A. Dunn) evolving into a 12-year-old sociopath demigod located somewhere on the spectrum between the moppet from the 'It's a Good Life' episode of *The Twilight Zone* and Damien Thorn.

While it's reasonable to wonder if more screen superheroes – or villains – can ever be the effective cure for our inundation with superhero cinema, *Brightburn* is something other than another business-as-usual antiheroic jape that only reinforces the dominant paradigm, à la *Kick-Ass* or *Deadpool*. Absent of stars save for Elizabeth Banks, playing Brandon's adoptive mother, it's unpleasant going in the way that only a relatively low-budget piece of work can afford to be, a film that's fascinated, as Brandon is, with the destruction of the flimsy human organism: witness a drawn-out piece of ocular horror that Lucio Fulci would have been proud of, or another particularly repugnant bit of business involving a human jaw left hanging off only one hinge.

While many superhero and supervillain origin stories are connected more or less explicitly to the experience of puberty and the discovery of

Alien adoption: Jackson A. Dunn

heretofore unknown powers, *Brightburn* links Brandon's awakening into a caped avenger to the alternating fantasies of self-aggrandisement and self-pity that the comics have historically considered and often flattered. Through Dunn's disquieting, affectless performance, *Brightburn* comes across less as a movie concerned with the grandiose complexes of a Batman or a Joker than with the bland psychosis of a James Eagan Holmes, who shot up a 2012 midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises*, or any of the young men who gestate to adulthood within an ascendant 'nerd culture' without ever developing the capacity for empathy or fellow feeling.

Part of the sick humour of the movie springs from incongruity. Even as Brandon discovers the awesome extent of his abilities, his aims remain petty, those of a nervous preadolescent: impress the girl, keep a secret from his parents. It seems like a conscious decision and a compromise to essentially remove the now ubiquitous superhero paraphernalia from the world of the film – how else do you keep the onscreen Superman jibes at bay? – but the bleak joke of the premise remains: we should all, by now, be able to recognise the sight of a rampaging fanboy despoiling the Earth when we see it.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Gunn
Kenneth Huang
Written by
Brian Gunn
Mark Gunn
Director of Photography
Michael Dellatorre
Edited by
Andrew S. Eisen
Peter Gvozdas
Production Designer
Patrick M. Sullivan Jr
Original Score
Tim Williams
Sound Mixer
Erik H. Magnus
Costume Designer
Autumn Steed
Visual Effects
Trixter
Tempest FX
Stunt Co-ordinator
Lonnie R. Smith Jr

©Brandenburg The Film, LLC
Production Companies
Screen Gems and Stage 6 Films present an H Collective presentation
A Troll Court Entertainment production
Executive Producers
Nic Crawley
Kent Huang
Simon Hatt
Dan Clifton
Brian Gunn
Mark Gunn
Ali Jazayeri
David Gendron

Cast
Elizabeth Banks
Tori Breyer
David Denman
Kyle Breyer
Jackson A. Dunn
Brandon Breyer
Matt Jones
Noah McNichol
Meredith Hagner
Merilee McNichol
Becky Wahlstrom
Erica
Emmie Hunter
Caitlyn
Greg Alan Williams
Sheriff Deever
Annie Humphrey
Deputy Ayres

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

Brightburn, Kansas, ten years ago. Kyle and Tori Breyer, a young couple living on a farm who have been trying unsuccessfully to have a child, are disturbed one night by a loud crashing noise outside.

Present day. Kyle and Tori have a 12-year-old son, Brandon. Brandon believes he was adopted, but in fact fell from the sky that night in a meteor-like spacecraft, which his adoptive parents now keep locked in the barn. Brandon discovers that he has super-strength, can fly and is impervious to harm. His parents are concerned when he breaks the hand of a classmate. Soon afterwards, he murders the classmate's mother, then kills his uncle in what is staged to look like a drunk-driving accident. Kyle, finding bloodstained clothing, becomes suspicious. He takes Brandon on a hunting trip with the intention of putting a bullet in the boy's brain, but the shot merely perturbs Brandon, who incinerates Kyle's face with heat vision. Tori is finally convinced of the need to kill Brandon when he returns to wreak havoc on the family home, butchering two local sheriffs. However, he foils Tori's attempt to stop him using a shiv made from a shard of the spacecraft – the only substance known to harm him. He flies her high into the stratosphere, then lets her fall to the ground. Downing an approaching passenger jet, he continues on his reign of terror.

The Captor

Canada/USA/Sweden 2018
Director: Robert Budreau
Certificate 15 92m 9s

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

First coined by a Swedish psychiatrist examining the responses of the people held captive in a robbery of the city's Kreditbanken in August 1973, the phrase 'Stockholm syndrome' rapidly entered the vernacular thanks to the media's fascination with the hostage and hijacking situations of the era. Indeed, the notion that criminals and captives could forge strong emotional bonds became so widely accepted that it was ripe for spoofs such as the one in *Die Hard* (1988), where the pompous author of a book titled *Hostage Terrorist, Terrorist Hostage: A Study in Duality* shares his thoughts about 'Helsinki syndrome' on live TV as his words are juxtaposed with the grislier goings-on inside Nakatomi Plaza. Eschewing the sweaty tension of most hostage thrillers for a darkly comedic tone more akin to that satirical gag, *The Captor* is less interested in explaining the phenomenon than in portraying how the shared incompetence and rashness of crooks and cops alike may have been the event's true defining aspects.

Released as *Stockholm* in the US and Canada, Robert Budreau's third feature is principally inspired by 'The Bank Drama', the 1974 *New Yorker* article that first publicised many of the case's most confounding aspects. Ethan Hawke's Lars and Mark Strong's Gunnar, the film's fictionalised stand-ins for real-life robbers Jan-Erik Olsson and Clark Olofsson, could almost be dismissed as hapless bumblers if not for the high likelihood that their actions could get people killed. (Characters seem especially slow to realise that bullets tend to ricochet when fired in steel-walled vaults.) Similarly, their police adversary Mattsson (veteran Swedish actor Christopher Heyerdahl) is a far cry from the canny negotiators epitomised by Walter Matthau in Joseph Sargent's *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974) and Denzel Washington in Spike Lee's *Inside Man* (2006).

As a story of criminal ineptitude, *The Captor* has a clearer kinship with Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), which was based on another memorably botched bank robbery of the early 1970s. Whereas Sargent, Lumet and Lee made vivid use of their stories' settings to give their films all the energy and local colour viewers expect of New York stories, Budreau finds a droller kind of humour in the disparity between the criminals' brashness – born out of Lars's enthusiasm for Hollywood movies and Bob Dylan songs – and the reserved reactions more typical of the Nordic context.

Steal my heart: Ethan Hawke

While not always convincing or compelling as a thriller, *The Captor* remains sufficiently engaging thanks to the cast's evident enjoyment of the material's many curveballs. It marks Hawke's second collaboration with Budreau after *Born to Be Blue* (2015), a not-quite-biopic of trumpeter Chet Baker, and he again relishes the chance to play the kind of man who acts on impulse while always knowing there'll be a steep cost for his short-sightedness. Noomi Rapace, as captive bank employee Bianca, also seems to appreciate the rare opportunity to operate in a lighter register. She aces the film's most amusing moment, when both sides of the stand-off hit the pause button so that her character can give her terrified husband instructions for the fish dinner he'll be cooking solo for the kids. Thankfully, it's 1973 and her poor hubby hasn't heard of Stockholm syndrome yet. If he suspected what could happen between Bianca and her kidnapper, he'd feel even worse. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Nicholas Tabarrok Robert Budreau Jonathan Bronfman Fredrik Zander **Written by** Robert Budreau Based on the New Yorker article *The Bank Drama* by Daniel Lang **Director of Photography** Brendan Steacy **Editor** Richard Comeau **Production Designer** Aidan Leroux **Original Score/ Conductor** Steve London **Location Sound Mixer** Robert Fletcher **Costume Designer** Lea Carlson **Stunt Co-ordinator** James Binkley

©Bankdrama Film Ltd & Chimney **Production Companies** Entertainment One presents A Darius Films production in association with Lumanity, Chimney and JoBro Productions, Productivity Media, Blumhouse Productions and Sierra/Affinity With the participation of Telefilm Canada, The Ontario Media Development Corporation, Filmegion Stockholm-Mälardalen/Film Capital Stockholm and The Harold Greenberg Fund A Robert Budreau film Made with the generous support of The Movie Network **Executive Producers** Scott Aversano Jason Blum William G. Santor John Hills Andrew Chang-Sang Patrick Roy Christina Kubacki Will Russell-Shapiro Lowell Cauffiel Jon Mankell

Cast
Ethan Hawke Lars Nystrom **Noomi Rapace** Bianca Lind **Mark Strong** Gunnar Sorensson **Christopher Heyerdahl** Chief Mattsson **Mark Rendall** Elov Eriksson **Bea Santos** Klara Mardh **Ian Matthews** Detective Halsten Vinter **Thorbjörn Harr** Christopher Lind

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Signature Entertainment

Canadian theatrical title **Stockholm**

Stockholm, 1973. Disguising his identity with a wig and a fake American accent, ex-convict Lars enters a bank and takes two employees hostage. His captives are Bianca, a married woman with two children, and her co-worker Klara; a third hostage, Elov, is later discovered hiding. Police superintendent Mattsson arrives to negotiate. Lars demands $1 million, a getaway car and the release of Gunnar, a friend in prison. Lars and Gunnar are reunited at the bank. Gentler than his more violent partner, Lars grows close to Bianca. She lets him pretend to shoot her in order to demonstrate the kidnappers' seriousness. Later that night, Lars and Bianca make love. Mattsson orders his men to drill into the vault and pump in gas, but is prevented by threats against Elov and Klara. After Mattsson agrees to their demands, Gunnar and Lars go to the car with their captives, but it has a flat tyre and they retreat inside. Now knowing that Bianca's death was a trick, Mattson starts pumping the gas. When Gunnar threatens to kill Bianca, Lars shoots him in the shoulder. Mattsson and his men storm the vault. The hostages shield Lars to prevent him from being shot. Later, Bianca visits Lars in prison.

The Corrupted

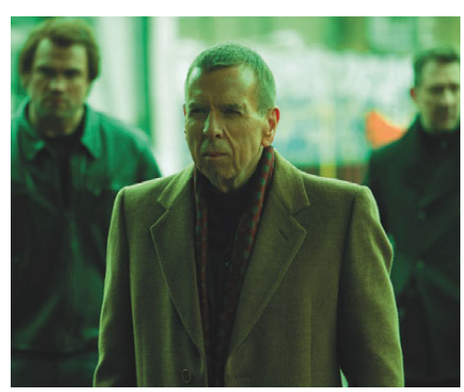
United Kingdom/USA 2018
Director: Ron Scalpello
Certificate 18 103m 20s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Given that screenwriter Nick Moorcroft's wayward CV includes the *St Trinian's* films and John Landis's *Burke & Hare*, as well as the recent feelgood-factor *Fisherman's Friends*, it's just possible *The Corrupted* was conceived as a straight-faced skit anthologising every cliché of the contemporary British crime film. Its primal-scene prologue – the murder of the protagonist's scrapyard owner dad (Shaun Dooley) – roots the corruption of the arch-villain's East London empire in the Olympic bid. Whispery self-made weasel Clifford Cullen – a nastily glinting Timothy Spall – is as likely to deliver a speech about Barnardo's orphans' homes or why he voted for Brexit as he is to execute a foul-up footsoldier with a bolt gun as he hangs amid butchered pigs after the manner of *The Long Good Friday* (1980).

Also in the mix is Sam Claflin as a sensitive hardman ex-con who sees through Cullen's sinister speeches about family and legacy when he tumbles to the fact that he's only an orphan because the man who donates to orphans' charities has made him one. Genre veteran Noel Clarke is the single honest cop on the local force, catching on way too late to the fact that he shouldn't trust those on his side of the law any more than he does the opposition. The elder statesmen of corruption here are plausible city smoothie Hugh Bonneville and self-hating brown-envelope-receiving DCI David Hayman, who take part in many shady meetings on riverfront terraces and (unwisely for one conspirator) the roof of an office block. Baddies are all very bad and innocents all very innocent, though imperilled Naomi Ackie finds good use for a sharpened Afro hair comb. A parade of tattooed, grinning, thumping thugs rather ineptly do crimes all over the well-kept concrete wasteland that is the 'Olympics legacy' version of Harold Shand's old Docklands patch.

The film runs to a few sharply scripted moments – when Cullen tries to delay payment to his South American drug suppliers after a raid has scooped his product, Bonneville's Hammond deadpans: "They may speak Spanish, Cliff, but *mañana* isn't a word they understand." But mostly it harps on tired themes, with speeches to emphasise the importance of family and the pervasive corruption of London. Claflin, all beard and tats in a scruffier hero role than his clean-cut contributions to the *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Hunger Games* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchises, looks more upset



London underground: Timothy Spall

when he has to dispose of his distinctive fleece-collared jacket to evade police pursuit than when he learns that his brother has been put in a hole... and the height of his desire for family life seems to be a 'kickabout' with his undercharacterised boy. As ever, the villains are more fun to be around, though they don't seem to get much enjoyment out of their wicked ways – sitting or standing about in gloomy interiors plotting, and mostly getting knocked off by a higher class of assassins who seem to have strayed in from 1970s paranoia movies.

Director Ron Scalpello stages a couple of decent chases, though the attempt at grand-scale extravagance on an American exploitation scale – a fleeing hoodlum spraying bullets around a school corridor – scuppers the opening 'based on true events' caption by divorcing the whole film from anything like reality. It's a cut above the brand of gangland thuggery that proliferates in the *Rise of the Footsoldier* segment of the marketplace, in that it has ambitions to be more than just a succession of punch-ups, shoot-outs, blags and knees-ups... but it is undeniably just another cockney crimesploitation picture.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Andrew Berg
John Sachs
Nik Bower
Laure Vaysse
Written by
Nick Moorcroft
Director of Photography
Richard Mott
Editor
Peter Christelis
Production Designers
Byron Broadbent
Gregory Shaw
Music
Andrew Kawcynski
Production Sound Mixer
Ashok Kumar
Costume Designer
Anthony Unwin
Stunt Co-ordinator
Tony Lucken

©Reliance Entertainment Productions Crime Ltd
Production Companies
MPC presents in association with Creativity Capital and The Exchange, Head Gear Films, Metrol Technology and Kreo Films an Eclipse Films, Rep Crime and Riverstone Pictures production
Produced in association with Powder Keg Pictures and Fred Films
A Ron Scelpello film
Executive Producers
Deepak Nayar
James Spring
Giovanna Trischitta
Nat McCormick
Caddy Vanasirikul
Brian Berg
Lynne Elizabeth Berg
Alex Thrussell
Charles Low
Richard Kondal
Patrick Fischer
Meg Leonard
Nick Moorcroft
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross

Cast
Timothy Spall
Clifford Cullen
Sam Claflin
Liam McDonagh
David Hayman
DCI Raymond Ellery
Noel Clarke
DS Neil Beckett
Charlie Murphy
DC Gemma Connelly
Naomi Ackie
Grace
Joe Claflin
Sean McDonagh
Sam Otto
Nayan Khaliq
Cathal Pendred
Gerry Dwyer
Hugh Bonneville
Anthony Hammond
Shaun Dooley
Eamonn McDonagh

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

East London, present day. Liam McDonagh, out of prison on licence after serving time for armed robbery, tries to go straight and reconnect with his former partner Grace and their son Archie. However, Liam's brother Sean is involved in the criminal empire of property developer Clifford Cullen, who has ties with corrupt police and local politics. Neil Beckett, an honest policeman, believes that Cullen has murdered an erring underling and used corrupt officers to cover up the crime. Beckett pressures Sean into becoming an informer, which leads to Cullen having Sean murdered – leaving Liam with a stash of Cullen's cash. Beckett goes on the run after being framed by his corrupt superior DCI Ellery, and teams up with Liam when Cullen kidnaps Grace and Archie. Beckett is killed by his own partner, Connelly, who is part of the cover-up. Having learned that Cullen was responsible for the murder of his father, Liam kills him at the exchange of cash for hostages – but the web of corruption persists.

The Curse of La Llorona

USA 2018
Director: Michael Chaves
Certificate 15 93m 5s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Overly repetitive and uncreative with its scares, *The Curse of La Llorona* squanders a folk tale that has terrified generations of youngsters who have wanted to stay up late: La Llorona ('the Weeping Woman') drowned her children and, while stuck on earth searching for their bodies, kidnaps and drowns other kids she encounters at night. There's nothing like a mother's love!

This fairly simple, universal legend (she's essentially a Mexican banshee) is located within the 'Conjuring Universe', which has no real bearing on the story save for the fact that it's set in the 1970s and involves a family. (A priest who had a run-in with the Annabelle doll gets a cameo, but does nothing except provide exposition.) The film's undercooked concerns about mothers and what makes a good one are carried by Anna (Linda Cardellini, too good for the role), a widowed social worker in Los Angeles who unwittingly exposes a client's children to La Llorona after a routine welfare check. Removed from the closet their mother had sequestered them in, the two boys are attacked by the dripping-wet spirit in the halls of the social-services shelter where Anna has placed them. (The J-horror vibes of this sequence, with its eerie green light and silent, black-eyed kids, is reminiscent of *The Grudge*, and the closest the film ever gets to anything resembling style.) The police subsequently find the boys drowned near the basin of the iconic Sixth Street Viaduct; and, because single mum Anna has brought her kids along in the car, La Llorona becomes fixated on them.

That a social worker would be called to a crime scene to see the dead bodies of her client's children isn't terribly plausible, nor is La Llorona's inexplicable tendency to play with her victims before she kills them. Rather than a violent, otherworldly force eager to swoop up some sweet little kiddies, La Llorona comes off more like an overgrown bully, doing some light poltergeist tricks – slamming doors, moving things around, that whooshing noise – and, at one critical moment, stopping short of drowning Anna's daughter in the family bathtub. She's a supernatural being who's been wandering the earth for hundreds of years dedicated to doing this. Why stop within seconds of finishing the job?

The Mexorcist: Raymond Cruz, Linda Cardellini

While good horror isn't about logic but feeling, that's also in short supply here: Anna's family have been given no discernible traits, and the terrorising only makes the kids withdrawn (ie even less expressive). To rid them of La Llorona, Anna is advised to call in Rafael (Raymond Cruz), a *curandero* (shaman) who practises healing rituals that blend Catholic and indigenous elements. This kicks off the final, tedious third of the film. Like similar characters in every other one of the *Conjuring* movies, Rafael will perform a ritual, think that he has finally banished the evil spirit, and then it will come back for some inane reason – wash, rinse, repeat. Though some of these rites – successfully preserved through hundreds of years of violent colonisation – gesture at Mexico's cultural richness, their existence fails to add much nuance to this flavourless film.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Wan
Gary Dauberman
Emile Gladstone
Written by
Mikki Daughtry
Tobias Iaconis
Director of Photography
Michael Burgess
Edited by
Peter Gvozdas
Production Designer
Melanie Jones
Music
Joseph Bishara
Sound Mixer
Julian Howarth
Costumes Designed by
Megan Spatz
Visual Effects
Ingenuity Studios
Digital Domain
Stunt Co-ordinators
Rob King
Kurt Bryant

©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.
Production Companies
A New Line Cinema presentation
An Atomic Monster/ Emile Gladstone production
Executive Producers
Richard Brener
Dave Neustadter
Walter Hamada
Michelle Morrissey
Michael Clear

Cast
Linda Cardellini
Anna Tate-Garcia
Roman Christou
Chris
Jaynee-Lynne Kinchen
Samantha
Raymond Cruz
Rafael Olvera
Marisol Ramirez
La Llorona
Patricia Velasquez
Patricia Alvarez
Sean Patrick Thomas
Detective Cooper
Tony Amendola
Father Perez
Irene Keng
Donna
Oliver Alexander
Carlos
Aiden Lewandowski
Tomas

Dolby Atmos
In Colour [2.35:1]

Some screenings in Screen X

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

Mexico, 1673. A woman in white and her two children play in a field. One of the boys becomes separated, and finds his mother drowning his brother in a river.

Los Angeles, 1973. Anna, a social worker, fails to get her children Chris and Samantha to the school bus on time, making her late for work. She goes to check on Patricia Alvarez, whose two sons haven't been attending school. Anna discovers that the boys have been locked in a closet. Patricia insists that she is protecting them from La Llorona – the woman in the opening scene – but Anna takes them to a social-services facility. Late at night, La Llorona appears and kills the boys. Anna goes to see their bodies, taking the sleeping Chris and Samantha with her in the car. Chris wakes and wanders around, following the sound of a crying woman – it is La Llorona, who grabs him and burns her fingerprints into his arm. La Llorona begins troubling the children at home; Anna's co-workers mistake this for abuse. Anna seeks out a priest, who recommends that she ask Rafael, a 'curandero', to help cast out La Llorona. After performing numerous rituals, Anna destroys La Llorona by staking her heart with a cross. But as Anna walks Rafael to a cab the next morning, she thinks she glimpses La Llorona's reflection in a puddle.

Division 19

United Kingdom/USA 2019
Director: S.A. Halewood

Reviewed by Chris Hall

It's 2039 and, in S.A. Halewood's low-budget dystopian thriller *Division 19*, anonymity is a crime. Jails have become online entertainment, with pay-per-view subscribers voting on what the prisoners should do and who they should fight. And now Panopticon TV is about to cover an entire town, where the inmates will live alongside the general public and the entertainment will become even more interactive. But a group of outsiders – Division 19 – have worked out how to live off the grid, away from the near-total surveillance exemplified by the huge gunship drone hovering in the sky above. They plan to fight back, starting with springing Hardin Jones (Jamie Draven) – a prisoner who's become an unwitting global star – from jail.

The main target in the opening speech would seem to be the bovine consumerist society that has allowed this bleak future to happen. "Look at you, with your smartphones and your flat whites, power shakes and SUVs, stuffing your faces while the world burns. Do you like what they gave you? You fat enough yet?" But apart from this call to arms, the resistance offers a very downbeat fightback.

The recipe for *Division 19* seems to be to take big chunks of *Blade Runner*, *The Truman Show*, *The Running Man* and *District 13* (especially the parkour), stir in some *Big Brother* and *A Scanner Darkly* and sprinkle with *The Hunger Games*, *Total Recall*, *Escape from New York* and a dozen other SF films. The result is bland, generic gruel. Right away, the filmic debts pile up. A voice flatly interrogates Hardin – "Tell me about your brother" – in the same timbre as the empathy test in *Blade Runner*, and it's the same echo-laden voice broadcasting from the floating advertising hoardings too.

Being constantly reminded of lots of other, better films is one thing, but it's also hard to suspend disbelief when the physical space is a kind of exquisite corpse stitched together from Detroit, London and Los Angeles. *Division 19* relies far too heavily on cheap-looking video effects such as point-of-view CCTV to create its benighted world, when it might have done better to focus on the interpersonal dynamics and plot. It's all very confused and there's little wit to leaven things. The concept of people being able to control what prisoners do is largely unexplored – we see the controllers and the outsiders but not the enslaved society, not what's at stake. Where are these cowed citizens? Perhaps so cowed that we don't see them.

Big sister: Alison Doody

Division 19 is at least helped along by Alison Doody as Nielsen, the icily unpleasant data-warehousing specialist behind the Panopticon project. Nielsen has one of the best lines in the film, when she's talking about Hardin: "He's had more drugs pumped into him than Central America. Crime's down. Consumerism's up. What's not to like?" Likewise, the always excellent Clarke Peters as the outsider Perelman – who invented the concept of the prisoner town but for rehabilitative purposes instead – also injects some much needed life.

Ultimately, any nuance in exploring notions of surveillance is subjugated by the need for action. The path through *Division 19* is cluttered with themes too big for it to take anywhere – the nature of reality, consumer capitalism, identity, determinism and society as a prison. *Division 19* means well but it's badly in need of focus and sadly misses its targets. If anonymity is a crime, then this film should be prosecuted on its own terms.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Suzie Halewood
Diane Kasperowicz
Christina Varotsis
Written by
S.A. Halewood
Director of Photography
Ben Moulden
Editor
Jessica Brunetto
Laura Morrod
Designer
John Collins
Score
David O'Dowda
Sebastian Fayle
Paul E. Francis
Sound Mixers
Clayton Perry
Brian Robinson
Eric Bautista
Costume Designers
Malgosia Wojtkowski
Chloe Ji Yoon

©Division 19 Ltd
Production Companies
Gas Station 8 presents
Cellophane Films and ITC Capital
Executive Producers
David Mutch
Kathryn Sheard
Jan Wieringa
Chris Byard
Otto Pouyiouros
Adam Draper
Melissa Simmonds
Michael Ilitch Jr
Glenn Murray
Julie May
Zach Dunn

Cast
Jamie Draven
Hardin Jones
Linus Roache
Charles Lyndon
Will Rothhaar
Nash
Lotte Verbeek
Aisha
Toby Hemingway
Barca
Alison Doody
Alexandra Neilsen
Clarke Peters
Perelman
L. Scott Caldwell
Michelle Jacobs
Ashton Moio
Peretti
Anthony Okungbowa
Martins

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Miracle Communications

The near future. Anonymity is a crime; social control has led to mass incarceration and widespread surveillance. With prisons overflowing and an election looming, the government, led by Charles Lyndon, brings in data-warehousing specialist Alexandra Neilsen. She turns the jails into interactive online entertainment, with viewers voting on what the inmates should eat, wear and read, and who they should fight. One of the prisoners, Hardin Jones, becomes a favourite with the viewers. Division 19, a resistance group of hackers who live off the grid, rescue Jones, planning to use his global fame to fight back against government control. However, Jones escapes from them too, not realising that his brother Nash is among the group. When Lyndon sees the extent of Neilsen's plan to populate a whole town with prisoners and turn it into a large-scale interactive project, he shuts it down.

Ferrante Fever

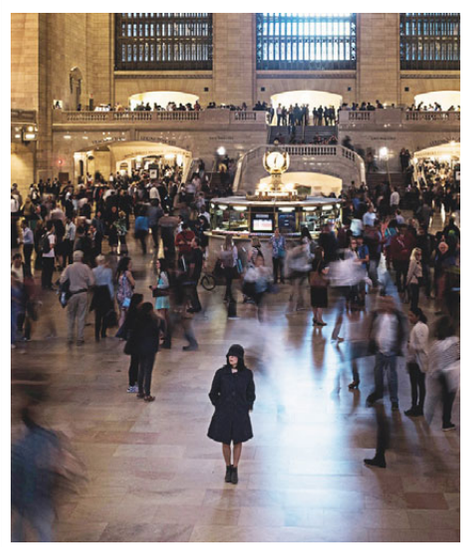
Italy 2017
Director: Giacomo Durzi

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

'Ferrante fever' started as a gimmicky tag invented by the publicists at a New York bookshop, McNally Jackson, to whip up its customers' already intense interest in the release of each new instalment of the 'Neapolitan novels' by the bestselling Italian author Elena Ferrante. Yet it's a curiously dark metaphor – like 'mania', 'fever' implies that there's something pathological going on, something you need to snap out of, or it surely can't end well.

Unfortunately, none of the interviewees in Giacomo Durzi's earnest and slightly dull hagiography has any intention of interrogating this darkness, the general message being 'she's a genius' and not much more. Although we hear a lot about how addictively readable the novels are, we're not asked to ponder the problematic compulsion such addiction implies. It's true that once you plunge into *My Brilliant Friend* and the world of Lenù and her strange, powerful, vulnerable, recalcitrant childhood friend Lila, you shouldn't count on seeing daylight again until you emerge, gasping and wounded, at the end of the fourth book, *The Story of the Lost Child*. But what do we mean when we say that art debilitates or coerces us in this way? Such interesting questions are drowned out by a kind of 70-minute exclamation of amazement that books might have anything at all, other than mere entertainment, to offer.

The film begins with the voice of Hillary Clinton, on the campaign trail in 2016, humanising her public image by talking passionately (and genuinely) about how avidly she reads Ferrante. The theme continues: we hear from Ferrante's publisher, her translator, and from others with a vested interest; and, more interestingly, from authors who are fans, including Roberto Saviano, Nicola Lagioia, Elizabeth Strout and Jonathan Franzen. These four come closest to figuring out exactly what Ferrante does on the page to make her readers feel so deeply involved and personally affected. Strout talks about Ferrante's adamantine honesty; Franzen tries to explain how she excavates a deep sense of rage. Lagioia perhaps gets it best: "She tells us that if you're lucky, and



Author unknown: *Ferrante Fever*

especially if you desire it, if you're talented and strong-willed, you can discover something about life you did not know. But there is a price to pay for this – to remain disappointed."

This whiff of emotional and intellectual brutality is one key to the power of Ferrante's writing, and for readers in the US, or so the film implies, it is precisely her distance from them, her unavailability, that gives her permission to evoke such troubling reactions. First of all, she is Italian, and so is filtered by geography and translation and arrives without baggage and apparently without history. More importantly – famously – she is an enigma, a pseudonym, projected on to the world with no shtick, no tour, no chat-show patter. 'Elena Ferrante' is contained within the novels and the sparse public pronouncements she has made about her work, and exists nowhere else, despite several attempts to 'unmask' her. For the filmmakers, this presents an obvious problem: they can voice up some quotes – from her non-fiction, not the novels, which are presumably heavily protected by copyright – and lay them over workmanlike street scenes filmed in Naples. But Ferrante the human being remains entirely textual, imaginary – and not terribly cinematic.

To break up the inevitably static interviews, there are some evocative pencil-style animations of scenes and characters from the books, and these provide a frustrating hint of a much more interesting film that might have been made from the material. Ferrante describes her own creative method as a process of 'dissolving' and 'shattering' of experience, and this might have been an invitation to create something less linear and more expressionistic than Durzi attempts here. But that's the kind of power 'Elena Ferrante' has: everyone tiptoes around her, and no one can say quite why.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Alessandra Acciai, Giorgio Magliulo, Roberto Lombardi
Idea and Written by Laura Buffoni, Giacomo Durzi
Director of Photography Beppe Gallo
Editing Paola Freddi, Mirko Platania
Original Music Andrea Bergesio, Valentina Gaia
Sound Editing and Mix Marco Saitta
Animation Mara Cerri, Magda Guidi

©Malia srl
Production Companies A Malia production with Raicinema In collaboration with Mibact, QMI, Sky Arte, With the support of the Campania Regional Film Commission In association with Inoxfucine Group Srl in accordance with tax credit legislation

In Colour [1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor Modern Films

A documentary about the Italian author known by the pseudonym Elena Ferrante. The film includes interviews with fans of Ferrante's work, among them her US publisher Michael Reynolds, her translator Ann Goldstein and fellow authors Roberto Saviano, Nicola Lagioia, Elizabeth Strout and Jonathan Franzen. The film focuses on the 'fever' that gripped the public, especially in the US, as each of her four 'Neapolitan novels' was published, and explores readers' intense emotional reaction to the books. Extracts from Ferrante's 2003 non-fiction publication 'La frantumaglia', voiced by an actor, provide some insight into her philosophy and processes as an author. Also included are clips from film adaptations of Ferrante's early books, and pencil-style animations of some key scenes and characters.

The Flood

Director: Anthony Woodley

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

For filmmakers, it often seems an easier task to whip up compassion for the refugees who are driven by impossible circumstances to seek a new life in Western Europe than it is to find sympathy for the immigration officers tasked with granting or denying them entry. This modestly resourced British movie makes an effort to understand both sides, even if its insistence on seeing the good in everyone proves at once a thematic strength and a dramatic liability. It should be noted, however, that director Anthony Woodley, writer Helen Kingston and producer Luke Healy spent time volunteering in the 'Jungle' migrant camp on the outskirts of Calais, so there's a certain commitment to authenticity in what we see on screen, whether or not we respond to or agree with the story's treatment of its gnarly social issues.

Indeed, if niceness alone were reason to grant immigration status, the Eritrean asylum-seeker at the heart of events would be waved through right away. Actor Ivanno Jeremiah is one of those performers who radiates expressive soulfulness, and he's well cast as the fate-tossed Haile, who remains positively saintly in the face of his privations – which begin in the Eritrean army, where he is charged with treason and tortured after showing mercy to a prisoner. Jeremiah is undoubtedly affecting in the role, which is clearly drawn in such a way as to dispel any clichéd assumptions that asylum-seekers are merely scroungers out to take advantage of hard-pressed UK taxpayers. The film is adamant that there are worthy cases among the numbers seeking illegal entry, but one is left to wonder whether Haile's aura of nobility takes special pleading a bit too far, hence impacting on the story's dramatic viability.

That's unfortunate, since the rather measured narrative progress, cutting to and fro between Jeremiah's traumatic odyssey and a bland, boxy room in England where Lena Headey's immigration officer seems stuck, initially at least, in 'bad cop' mode, has an otherwise convincing documentary feel to keep us relatively engrossed. Here again, though, the

Strange land: Ivanno Jeremiah

screenplay's determination to avoid the obvious proves laudable yet problematic. In trying not to portray the embattled official as some unfeeling jobsworth drone, Headey is cumulatively characterised as an easy touch whose divorce proceedings have left her emotionally vulnerable. Ultimately then, the face-off between saintly goodness and soft heart seems too atypical and unwisely dramatically loaded to make a telling contribution to the immigration debate.

Most convincing in the end is Iain Glen – like Headey, a *Game of Thrones* stalwart – as the higher-up who brings a certain soothing affability into the workplace but remains keenly aware of his department's responsibility to meet refusal quotas. His assertion that it's by ticking the boxes and keeping government off their backs that they find the space to help refugees in genuine hardship rings truer than maybe anything else here. Indeed, a bit more stern pragmatism might have resulted in a film likelier to win over those resistant to the soft-grained good intentions that largely hold sway.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Luke Healy
Written by Helen Kingston
Cinematography Jon Muschamp
Edited by Mike Pike
Production Design Sophia Stocco
Music Billy Jupp
Sound Recorder John Thorpe
Costume Design Klaire Jamin

Production Companies Megatopia Films, Twickenham Studios
Executive Producers Lena Headey, Sunny Vohra, Julie-Anne Uggla, Merlin Merton, Matthew Helderman, Mike Woodley, Andrew Boswell

Cast
Lena Headey Wendy
Ivanno Jeremiah Haile
Peter Singh Faiz
Mandip Gill Reema
Jack Gordon Russell
Arsher Ali Nasrat
Iain Glen Philip

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Curzon Artificial Eye

England, the recent past. A container lorry is stopped by police on a country road and knife-wielding Eritrean migrant Haile is apprehended. After newspaper coverage, the government feels under pressure to deport him. Immigration officer Wendy handles Haile's asylum application, overseen by her boss Philip. She methodically works through the set questions, while Haile recounts how as a soldier in Eritrea he showed mercy to a prisoner and was then himself charged with treason and tortured before escaping and fleeing the country.

Flashbacks show Haile almost drowning at sea in an overloaded boat. He finds his way to the Calais migrant encampment, where he is befriended by Faiz and Reema, eager to reach the UK so that Reema can have her child there. They have money, but Afghani trafficker Nasrat has refused to talk to them because they are Pakistanis, so Haile does the deal and all three make the crossing in a lorry, with ailing Faiz dying en route.

Wendy, who is herself going through an ugly divorce and custody battle, proves sympathetic – especially to Haile's revelation that his mother gave him up when he was five – but has no grounds to grant him entry. However, during a subsequent interview with Reema, she learns that Haile's 'attack' on police was a diversion to help the pregnant woman escape. Wendy submits new information to aid Haile's appeal, much to the dismay of Philip, who insists on her taking time off work. Haile stays with Reema during the appeal process, while Wendy seeks to repair her own broken family.

Journal of Film Preservation

The *Journal of Film Preservation* is published twice a year by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). It offers a forum for both general and specialized discussions on all theoretical, technical and historical aspects of moving image archival activities. Articles are written in English, French or Spanish, with summaries in the other two languages.

PURCHASE THE CURRENT ISSUE, OR SUBSCRIBE TO THE JFP

1-year subscription (2 issues): 40€ + shipping costs
2-year subscription (4 issues): 70€ + shipping costs

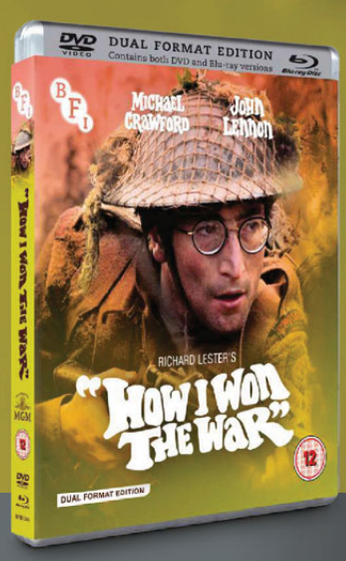
www.fiafnet.org

fiaf

Dedicated to the preservation of, and access to, the world's film heritage since 1938

BFI Film Forever

"HOW I WON THE WAR"



THE 1967 COMEDY CLASSIC PREVIOUSLY UNAVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY IN THE UK

Starring JOHN LENNON and MICHAEL CRAWFORD

Directed by RICHARD LESTER (*A HARD DAY'S NIGHT, HELP!*)

ORDER FROM
BFI MEMBERS ENJOY 15% OFF

BFI SHOP

Halston

USA/United Kingdom 2019
Director: Frédéric Tcheng
Certificate 12A 105m 11s

Reviewed by Matthew Turner

Fashion designers don't come much more iconic than Roy Halston Frowick, the complex and often confounding subject of Frédéric Tcheng's expansive, searching documentary portrait. Born in Iowa in 1932, Halston rapidly made a name for himself as a milliner while still in his twenties, most momentously in a supervisory role at New York's Bergdorf Goodman department store. A certain pillbox hat designed for the then First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, worn during JFK's inauguration, cemented the designer's growing renown. But it would be the next decade that truly bestowed superstar status: Halston's unprecedented sale of his line to a corporate entity transformed a single Manhattan boutique into a multi-stranded business empire, with penthouse headquarters fit for a mogul. Through his frequent patronage of Studio 54, his friendships with the famous and his ubiquity on television, he was also a high-profile public figure. However, the film suggests that it was Halston's desire to be all things to all people that precipitated his downfall, with the big-business suits that he'd got into bed with eventually ousting him from his own company.

For Tcheng, a specialist in intricately mounted profiles of couture icons from Diana Vreeland (*The Eye Has to Travel*, 2011) to Christian Dior (*Dior and I*, 2014), *Halston* represents his deepest dive yet into the psyche of a creative personality. Tcheng cites *Citizen Kane* and *film noir* as inspirations, the former recalled in a not entirely necessary framing device in which a fictional archivist, played by Tavi Gevinson, trawls through video recordings in a low-lit room at the Halston Enterprises building. The footage gleaned – some of it newly uncovered – is certainly rich in detail and artfully marshalled.

From an early stage, Halston was an enthusiastic adopter of the broadcast image to publicise himself and his work, his amused grin surfacing on both light-entertainment fluff and more po-faced interview segments. The stills amassed here are plentiful too, as we witness the designer morphing from the shaggy-haired Young Turk who crafted masks for Truman Capote's 1966 Black and White Ball to the poised, sleekly coiffed power player of later years. Punctuating the surfeit of images are adoring recollections from friends and collaborators, including Liza Minnelli (who famously wore Halston while accepting her 1973 Oscar for *Cabaret*), Joel

Grand designs: Roy Halston Frowick

Schumacher and Marisa Berenson. "Material for him was like clay for a sculptor," gushes Berenson, describing Halston's liberating, minimalist style. Model and jewellry designer Elsa Peretti, featured in combative archival interviews, is a hoot as she recounts cocaine-fuelled all-night work marathons with the designer.

In the often elitist realm of high-end fashion, Halston was something of an anomaly, seeking universal appeal in his ambition to "dress all of America". It's no surprise that the designer found a kindred spirit in Andy Warhol – both co-opted the mass market into their work to a varying degree. Tcheng is careful to spotlight this utopian bent, which ultimately led Halston to produce a discount range for high-street chain J.C. Penney. But this bold move proved to be a turning point. Bergdorf Goodman, piqued by the Penney concession, dropped Halston's line from its flagship store. Halston, meanwhile, became increasingly volatile and paranoid. Commentators provide mixed testimony on the reasons behind the decline, from substance abuse to the impositions of corporate management – even the influence of Halston's long-term partner Victor Hugo, who is heard speaking in archive audio. It's at this point that the *noir* element hinted at by Tcheng comes into play, with tales of boardroom shenanigans and after-hours office break-ins colouring accounts of how Halston was squeezed out of the empire he founded.

By the time the footage dries up, following the designer's retreat to California, we've seen plenty of him. Even so, his inscrutable bearing remains intact. Near the end, Gevinson's archivist discards the videotapes to try on a Halston dress for size – for all the exhaustive research and commentary on show, the film sneakily implies, it's the clothes that truly maketh its man.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Frédéric Tcheng, Roland Ballester
Producer Stephanie Levy, Paul Dallas
Written by Frédéric Tcheng
Research book of note: *Halston: Inventing American Fashion* by Lesley Frowick
Director of Photography Chris W. Johnson
Scripted Cinematography Aaron Kovalchik
Edited by Èlia Gasull Balada, Frédéric Tcheng
Production Designer *Scripted Scenes:* Markus Kirschner
Original Music Stanley Clarke
Re-recording Mixer Tom Efinger
Costume Designer *Scripted Scenes:* Megan Stark Evans

©Halston Real, LLC
Production Companies CNN Films, Dogwoof, TDog present A film by Frédéric Tcheng In association with Possibility Entertainment, Sharp House, Gloss
Executive Producers Amy Entelis, Courtney Sexton, Anna Godas, Oli Harbottle, Lesley Frowick, Ian Sharp, Rebecca Joerin-Sharp, Emma Dutton, Lawrence Benenson, Elyse Benenson, Douglas Schwalbe, Louis A. Martarano

Cast
Tavi Gevinson narrator

In Colour [2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor Dogwoof

A documentary investigating the life and career of pioneering fashion designer Roy Halston Frowick (1932-90). In staged scenes, a fictional archivist scours video recordings of Halston, hoping to discover the truth surrounding his abrupt exit from the industry in the mid-1980s. Via archival footage and interviews with friends and collaborators, the film traces Halston's rapid ascent from department-store milliner to boutique franchisee and icon of the Studio 54 era.

Halston's controversial partnerships with corporations and mass-market retailers are examined, along with the various factors that ultimately led him to be ousted from the company he founded.

The Hustle

USA 2019
Director: Chris Addison
Certificate 12A 94m 0s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Gender-swapped Hollywood remakes continue apace, with studios cautiously pairing female stars with retooled 'proven' projects to hedge their bets. *The Hustle* is a typical arranged marriage of this type, a brashly unfunny remake of the 1988 Steve Martin/Michael Caine classic *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* that joins the all-female *Ghostbusters* (2016) and the distaff-side *Ocean's Eight* (2018) on the frankly unnecessary movie-makeovers pile. This Riviera con-artists comedy is famously a remake of a remake, first sighted as the cheerfully misogynistic *Bedtime Story* (1964), in which David Niven and Marlon Brando fleeced the gullible millionairesses of the Côte d'Azur.

Third time unlucky then, as this nearly line-for-line retool is little more than a clumsy showcase for Anne Hathaway's light comic efforts and Rebel Wilson's sweary slapstick, as fake aristo Josephine and brassy grifter Penny make a reluctant partnership to rinse rich men. Cleaving closely to the *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* storyline and utilising large, familiar-sounding portions of its dialogue, it positively invites an uncomfortable compare-and-contrast assessment. Even Anne Dudley's jaunty Stéphane Grappelli-inflected jazz soundtrack pays close homage to Miles Goodman's 1988 version. But the film's disability fraud sequences (Penny masquerades as a blind woman and as a learning-disabled minor royal) transfer uneasily into 2019's inclusion culture.

The even bigger problem is that Wilson's coarse pantomime of chaos-causing 'Princess Hortense' or a treatment-seeking sightless ingénue is but a pale shadow of her predecessor Martin's deft, capering artistry and ability to inhabit multiple characters in the same role. The film's cons, creaky attempts to extort rings or cash from men with sob stories, feel kindergarten simple and implausible in the social-media age.

Hathaway, a nimble scammer in *Ocean's Eight*, is particularly poorly served here. She's stuck as Wilson's snob-vs-slob foil (despite their lack of spark together) until the movie lets her gambol as torturing Teutonic eye specialist 'Dr Shaffhausen', grimly determined to beat Penny in a race to scam a tech billionaire.

Most criminally, the film simply isn't funny, its flabby four-screenwriter-credit dialogue over-reliant on Wilson's vulgar gabble. Director Chris Addison, a deft *Veep* veteran, overloads his first feature with laboured accent comedy (Hathaway essays at least four, with mixed results) and pointless pratfalls, muffling the film's comic timing throughout.

Making much of paying back the patriarchy (Josephine's manifesto: "No man will ever believe a woman is smarter than him") the film conversely and overtly pits femininity against female appetites. Hathaway's performance-filled scams, masquerades of pretty vulnerability, are set for crass comic effect against Wilson's loud or sly grifting, full of greed for food, sex and money. As with Melissa McCarthy in 2013's *Identity Thief*, her plump unruly body is slammed violently into doors and pillars, and off water jet-packs, in what feels more like plus-size punishment than rule-breaking celebration. In the #MeToo era, why are their male marks ciphers (even Alex Sharp's awkwardly Zuckerbergian tech billionaire)

The age of guile: Rebel Wilson, Anne Hathaway

rather than wealthy harassers ripe for scamming and shaming? And why retain the original story's limp romcom payoff at all, or create the superfluous London coda that is determined to beat the film's one decent sight gag to death? All marketing, mugging and little mirth, *The Hustle* feels like one giant con on the audience.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Roger Birnbaum
Rebel Wilson
Screenplay
Stanley Shapiro
Paul Henning
Dale Launer
Jac Schaeffer
Story
Stanley Shapiro
Paul Henning
Dale Launer
Director of Photography
Michael Coulter
Film Editor
Ant Boys
Production Designer
Alice Normington
Music
Anne Dudley
Sound Supervisor
Matthew Collinge
Costume Designer
Emma Fryer
Stunt Coordinator
Marc Cass

©Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc.
Production Companies
Metro Goldwyn Mayer Pictures presents a Cave 76/Camp Sugar production
Executive Producers
Ilona Herzberg
Dale Launer
Charles Hirschhorn
Alison Owen

Cast
Anne Hathaway
Josephine Chesterfield
Rebel Wilson
Penny Rust
Alex Sharp
Thomas Westerburg
Dean Norris
Howard Bacon
Timothy Simons
Jeremy
Douggie McMeekin
Jason
Ashley McGuire
policewoman
Casper Christensen
Mathias
Eloise Lovell Anderson
beautiful woman (casino)
Philip Desmeules
dealer
Ingrid Oliver
Brigitte Desjardins

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

The Côte d'Azur, present day. Brassy small-time grifter Penny blackmails high-end con artist Josephine into training and partnering her. First they scam millionaires out of engagement rings by presenting Penny as the eccentric, dim-witted sister of Josephine's fake princess. Then they compete to scam amiable tech millionaire Thomas. Penny poses as a blind woman in need of treatment, spoiling Josephine's con. Josephine interposes herself as a German eye doctor, submitting Penny to humiliating tests and therapies. Penny gets Thomas alone by foisting a trio of Essex girls on Josephine. Thomas, revealing he's just a start-up app maker, offers his savings to heal Penny's sight. She has fallen in love with him. Josephine changes the bet – the first to get Thomas's declaration of love, wins. Josephine (as Dr Schaffhausen) tries to seduce Thomas, which he refuses, then appears to accept. Thomas tells Penny he loves her, and she 'regains' her sight after a fall. He reveals that he paid Dr Schaffhausen for her treatment. She refunds him the money before he leaves. Josephine appears, furious that con artist Thomas has tricked each of them out of $500,000. Days later, Thomas reappears as a Texan fixer, enlisting them to con money from a rare-breeds enthusiast. Finally, we see Penny and Josephine happily scamming in London, with Thomas.

Ibiza The Silent Movie

United Kingdom/Germany/Switzerland 2019
Director: Julien Temple

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Julien Temple has turned the later years of his career into a cottage industry making place-themed docs that always find their way on to the TV schedules. Given his influential track record in pop videos, some have been purely music-related, including *Glastonbury* (2006) and *Oil City Confidential* (2009), about Canvey Island rockers Dr Feelgood. However, he has also effectively moved on to potted cultural history with the likes of *Requiem for Detroit?* (2010), *London: The Modern Babylon* (2012), *Rio 50 Degrees* (2014) and *Habaneros* (2016). The musical impact of the club scene in Ibiza has clearly prompted his latest offering, and while the teaser subtitle 'The Silent Movie' might suggest otherwise, this historical survey includes a fulsome dance-driven soundtrack, with silent-style intertitles delivering relevant nuggets of information.

As the timeline reaches from Phoenician religious practices through to today's open-air mega-clubs, there's a slight feel of 'yoof' TV programming about using the lure of hedonism to slip the kids a bit of historical context. Still, the film's eagerness to keep it pacy and fun is no bad thing. Without a stock of relevant archive footage to fall back on, Temple visualises the distant past by bringing in costumed performers to portray Phoenician gods, Roman soldiers and Moorish kings alike. All of which has the air of pop-video outtakes, amusingly so given the not inappropriate presence of the semi-legendary Bez, the Happy Mondays' maraca-shaker in chief, as the Phoenicians' lord of the dance. Vintage movie clips also lend a hand, including choice moments from Anthony Mann's *El Cid* (1961) and a glowering Victor Mature from Edgar G. Ulmer's *Hannibal* (1959), though there's a sense that Temple is a bit more at home when the Dadaists pitch up in the 1930s and international bohemia begins its interaction with what was then an impoverished rural backwater.

The researchers have clearly done a diligent job in supplying Temple with intriguing material, from black-and-white reportage to bits of Barbet Schroeder's *More* (1969) and a host of TV news

Rave new world: Norman Cook

and smartphone footage. It's all a bit weightless, though, until the question of whether the island has sacrificed its soul in the pursuit of the tourist dollar lends some much needed thematic traction. Graphic-novel-style panels fix the domineering images of General Franco (who built the airport in the early 1960s) and Abel Matutes y Juan – scion of the island's moneyed dynasty, sometime *franquista* mayor and controller of myriad business interests profiting significantly from the tourist-driven expansion. As the cash rolled in, however, water-supply issues and drug use escalated, so that by the 1990s much of the water was undrinkable, and parched pill-popping youths who couldn't afford the exorbitant prices of bottled water in the clubs were clogging up local hospitals in worrying dehydrated numbers.

One senses that the caption-led 'silent movie' format isn't the most trenchant way of examining this gnarly state of affairs, where a more traditional investigative approach with witness testimony would surely have dug deeper. Temperamentally on the side of the kids, Temple ends on an elegiac note, as oligarchs, super-clubs and a roped-off VIP culture move in to price the youth out of a good time. Within the restrictions of his chosen framework, Temple cumulatively shapes a cautionary tale, concluding with a palpable sense of loss. Moreover, after the beat-driven music curated by Fatboy Slim, it all ends on a desolate note with Jack Nitzsche's eerie early-synth sounds from *Performance* (1970). After the thumping disco grooves, a telling moment of reflection.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Richard Conway
Andrew Curtis
Julien Temple
Written by
Julien Temple
Cinematographers
Violetta D'Agata
Stephen Organ
Editor
Caroline Richards
Art Director
Xavi Benlloch
Music Director
Fatboy Slim
Re-recording Mixer
Andrew Stirk
Costume Designer
Anna Bevan

©Essential Nitrate WK Ibiza Limited
Production Companies
Silver Reel presents in association with BBC Music and Cornerstone Films an Essential Arts Entertainment, Nitrate Film, Whizz Kid Entertainment production in association with Polite Storm, ZDF, Arte and Ingenious Media
A Julien Temple film
Executive Producers
Alison Thompson
Mark Gooder
Gerd Schepers
Claudia Bluemhuber
Ian Hutchinson
Florian Dargel
Malcolm Gerrie
for the BBC:
Jan Younghusband
Film Extracts
Amnesia (2002)
The Day (1960)
El Cid (1961)
Hallucination Generation (1966)
Annibale/ Hannibal (1959)
Mama Mia - Nur keine Panik (1984)
More (1969)
Sechs Schwedinnen auf Ibiza (1982)
Ulisse/Ulysses (1953)

Cast
Bez
Bes
Claire Davis
Tanit
Cathal Smyth [i.e. Chas Smash]
Hausmann

In Colour and Black & White [1.78:1]

Distributor
MusicFilmNetwork

A documentary exploring the history of the Spanish island of Ibiza, blending newly shot footage with archive film and smartphone clips, and using silent-film intertitles to convey contextual information. The Phoenician influence is still felt in Ibiza today, and both Romans and Moors passed through, yet the island remained a backwater for centuries, until Dadaist artist Raoul Hausmann fled there from the Nazis in the 1930s and brought international bohemia with him. The beatniks arrived in the 1950s, though the island remained largely unspoilt until General Franco's government boosted tourism with a new airport and fostered a development boom dominated by the rightwing Matutes family. Eventually, the explosion in visitor numbers reached breaking point, fuelled by a hedonistic clubbing and drugs culture, until the focus turned to an older, wealthier clientele, pricing out the exuberant youth. Opinion remains divided on whether the island's character has been sacrificed for economic gain.

I Love My Mum

United Kingdom 2018
Director: Alberto Sciamma
Certificate 15 86m 20s

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Sadly, all the sunshine from here to Marrakech can't save road comedy *I Love My Mum* from being a pallid affair. In this daft caper written and directed by horror specialist Alberto Sciamma, mouthy mother-and-son pairing Olga and Ron are uprooted from Tilbury, Essex, to Morocco by means of a bizarre accident. What promises to be a rollercoaster ride across Europe is instead about as entertaining as a bout of seasickness on a cross-Channel ferry.

There are gaping plot holes in the set-up here, but it's clearly a decent premise for a comedy. Stranded without cash or passports, the squabbling duo must hotfoot it back to the UK by fair means or foul, in between their frequent slanging matches. Conveniently enough, it's at this point that Ron finally learns that his estranged father was a coach driver Olga met on a French hen do, so a stop-off in Calais for the reunion adds a tinge of family drama to the mix. The pace is swift and there's an appealingly unhinged quality to the plot, but the undercooked script and under-directed action ensure that the comedy stumbles and the emotional resolutions mean little.

Kierston Wareing, probably best known as the neglectful mother in *Fish Tank* (2009), plays blowsy, impulsive Olga, while TV actor Tommy French makes his feature debut as her petulant son. Wareing we know can do better than this, and so French should perhaps be given the benefit of the doubt. But there's little chemistry between the two and the script offers only murky motivation for their mutual hatred and vile behaviour. And as they have a tendency to talk over each other, improv-style, their comic timing is frequently off. That said, the gags escalate rapidly, and fans of more grotesque humour may snicker at the sight of Olga giving a dog mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, or Ron wincing as he listens to his mother having sex.

A small but at least competent cameo from Dominique Pinon as a French restaurant manager raises the acting stakes a little, but it's clear that Sciamma is as much a fish out of water in the comedy genre as his Essex heroes are in continental Europe. This film peddles all the least endearing stereotypes of the Brit abroad: sunburnt Ron barking in English at foreigners, skimpily dressed Olga snoozing in the afternoon after sinking Chardonnay in the sunshine. There is grimmer stuff here too: a misjudged interlude on a boat full of asylum seekers, and an unnecessary, tacky catfight.

As Olga and Ron, suddenly divided by nationality, pursue their prized burgundy passports across the open borders of western Europe, it's tempting to read *I Love My Mum* as something to do with Brexit, but that's an awful lot of weight to load on the back of this slender beast. Perhaps, encountering these shambolic antics, the remaining EU countries will one day look back and be grateful that the British are further out of reach than ever.

All abroad: Tommy French, Kierston Wareing

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Alexa Waugh, Matt Hookings
Written by Alberto Sciamma
Director of Photography Fabio Paolucci
Editor Mark Davis
Production Designer Anna Papa
Composer/Music Programming & Orchestration/ Accordion Massimiliano Lazzaretti
Sound Designer Blair Jollands
Costume Designer Lisangela Sabbatella
©Pulpo Films Ltd
Production Companies Camelot Films, Amunet Productions & Pop Cow presents a film by Alberto Sciamma

Cast
Kierston Wareing Olga
Tommy French Ron
Aida Folch Paloma
Dominique Pinon waiter
Franck Lebœuf Alfred
Sara Martins Shanelle
Tim Downie Henry Brentwood
Younes Bouab Khalid

In Colour [2.35:1]
Distributor Camelot Films

UK, the present. Olga and her 21-year-old son Ron live in Tilbury, Essex. She has been in remission from cancer for several years. One night, indignant because Olga has eaten his cheese, Ron drives them both to the petrol station so that she can replace it; a road accident lands their car in a packing container, and the pair wake up en route to Morocco. At the British embassy in Morocco they are informed that Ron is not a British citizen and will need his French birth certificate to get home; Olga confesses to Ron that he is the child of a French coach driver. They hitch a ride with a taxi driver, and then join a refugee boat to cross to Spain. There they enter a singing contest but lose to the beautiful Paloma. Ron and Paloma become close, but Olga is accidentally burned and has to go to hospital. Ron and Paloma marry and Paloma secures forged passports for Olga and Ron. Mother and son set off for France but discover that Paloma has stashed drugs in their hire car. They cross the Pyrenees on foot and once in France see Paloma on the news, connected to a drugs ring. They visit Ron's father Alfred, who is living with his new wife. Alfred arranges Olga and Ron's paperwork and he and Ron reconcile. Olga and Ron finally head back to the UK. Just before they arrive home, Olga confesses that she never had cancer. She is run down by a bus.

In Safe Hands

France/Belgium 2018
Director: Jeanne Herry
Certificate 15 109m 50s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

At the end of her 2018 book *Mothers*, the feminist academic Jacqueline Rose, herself an adoptive mother, turns to the subject of adoption. If motherhood is bound up with questions of boundaries and possession, she writes, adoption gives such questions its own unique hue. Jeanne Herry's second feature, *In Safe Hands*, considers precisely what it is to become a mother, by choice or not, by biology or bureaucracy, charting one child's journey through the adoption process, beginning with a matter-of-fact scene of birth and ending at the emotive moment when the infant is embraced by his adoptive mother Alice.

The film opens in earnest as a young woman calling herself Charlotte (Leïla Muse) arrives at a hospital in Brest and announces she is in labour. Her pregnancy is unregistered; she does not want the child. The midwives attending her – sensitively, hesitantly – ask if she is sure, but Charlotte (whose real name is later revealed as Clara) is unwavering. Her decision sets in motion baby Théo's journey through the French adoption system, the ensuing narrative detailing in almost documentary fashion the various stages involved.

As we meet the individuals working to settle Théo with a new family, the idea that 'it takes a village to raise a child' has never seemed more apt. The film brings each character into its narrative through a neat audiovisual shorthand – a phone call, a cut, a musical interlude – as the baton is metaphorically passed on. Among those involved are Mathilde (Clotilde Mollet), the social worker who first liaises with Charlotte; gum-chewing caseworker Karine (Sandrine Kiberlain, playing very much against type) and her kindly colleague Lydie (Olivia Côte), tactfully hiding her own baby bump from the childless couples she works with; and finally Jean (Gilles Lellouche), the weary foster carer who, sick of dealing with adolescent dramas, agrees to play mother hen to Théo during the time that this tiny child is a ward of the state – the *pupille de l'état* from which the film's French-language title is derived. Jean describes the little boy as being like a "television on standby", waiting for his 'real' mother to arrive.

In Safe Hands offers a fascinating insight into the procedure and practices of adoption, drawing in part on some of the traditions of social realism (it's worth noting that Elodie Bouchez, who plays Alice, is perhaps most famous for her Cannes-winning role in Erick Zonca's realist masterpiece *The Dreamlife of Angels*). Still, beyond a brief glimpse into Jean's experience of caring for a pair of troubled teens, and a tense scene in which Lydie must explain to a furious couple why their application to adopt has been turned down, Herry steers clear of the grimmer realities of the care system. Likewise, Charlotte's largely unexplained decision to give up her child avoids tapping into contemporary debates around abortion. There are no unforeseen twists here, no melodramatic battles for custody. The pervading atmosphere is one of calm expediency and impartiality, the aesthetics mirroring the neutrality of the institutional spaces in which most of the action takes place.

If *In Safe Hands* emerges as a quiet celebration of the system's strengths, rather than an exploration of its weaknesses, this is no bad thing. As Alice

Birthday wish: Sandrine Kiberlain

kneels before her child, practically speechless, almost undone by this yearned-for event, it would be a hard heart indeed that would fail to be moved by her whispered greeting: "I'm so happy to meet you." The contrast with Charlotte's grim-faced refusal to look at Théo is a poignant reminder that not all mothers are born in the labour ward.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alain Attal
Hugo Sélignac
Vincent Mazel
Screenplay/ Dialogue
Jeanne Herry
Screenplay Consultant
Gaëlle Macé
Director of Photography
Sofian El Fani
Editing
Francis Vesin
Art Direction
Johann George
Original Music
Pascal Sangla
Sound
Nicolas Provost
Vincent Mauduit
Steven Ghouti
Costume Designer
Marie Le Garrec

©Trésor Films, Chi-Fou-Mi Productions, Studiocanal, France 3 Cinéma, Artémis Productions
Production Companies
Trésor Films and Chi-Fou-Mi Productions present a co-production of Trésor Films, Chi-Fou-Mi Productions, Studiocanal, France 3 Cinéma, Artémis Productions, VOO and Be tv
With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions
In association with Shelter Prod, Taxshelter.be, ING
With the support of the Tax Shelter of the Belgian Federal Government
With the participation of CNC - Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée and Région Île-de-France in partnership with the CNC
A film by Jeanne Herry

Cast
Sandrine Kiberlain Karine
Gilles Lellouche Jean
Élodie Bouchez Alice
Olivia Côte Lydie
Clotilde Mollet Mathilde
Jean-François Stévenin Alice's father
Bruno Podalydès Alice's ex
Miou-Miou Irène
Leïla Muse Clara, 'Charlotte'
Stéfi Celma Nurse Élodie
Youssef Hadji Ahmed

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

French theatrical title
Pupille

France, the present. Alice, 41, receives the news that she is to be given a three-month-old baby boy for adoption.

Three months earlier, a student calling herself Charlotte walks into a hospital in Brest and gives birth to a boy. She wants to give the baby up for adoption. Social worker Mathilde arranges to take the child, named Théo, into care. Caseworker Karine places him with foster carer Jean. Karine's colleague Lydie is one of several people liaising with potential adoptive parents. A series of flashbacks show Lydie meeting with Alice and her husband for the first time, and then dealing with Alice alone after the marriage breaks down. In the present, we see Alice at work, as a theatrical audio describer for deaf audiences. Théo is placed with a couple, but when they are unable to take him, he is offered to Alice. She renames him Matthieu. Promising to keep in touch with Jean, she embarks on her new life with her child.

John Wick Chapter 3 Parabellum

USA 2019
Director: Chad Stahelski
Certificate 15 130m 35s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

A running joke in *John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum* has it that even the assassins who are trying to bring down Keanu Reeves's beleaguered-but-still-brutally-efficient hitman have to stop and gush over their target, so sterling is Wick's standing in the contract-killing community. Such moments reflect in the world of *Wick* the sort of fan culture that the movies are themselves products of, bathysphere-like objects belonging wholly to the history of action cinema and the culture of the second unit, with no reference to an identifiable outside social reality. The films' primary architect, 50-year-old stuntman-cum-director Chad Stahelski, cut his teeth during the moment in the 1990s when Hong Kong action was making its American landfall – he doubled for Reeves on *The Matrix* (1999), which was choreographed by Yuen Woo-ping – and the influence of HK is everywhere in his third *Wick*. Keanu uses his belt as a weapon like Jet Li in *Fist of Legend* (1994), busts through more breakaway glass than Jackie Chan in *Police Story* (1985), stalks through a hall of mirrors like Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon* (1973) and squares off with an NBA big man like Lee in *Game of Death* (1978) – here it's Philadelphia 76ers giant Boban 'Bobi' Marjanovic in the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar role.

More often, however, the lumbering Reeves will have to throw his weight around smaller, fleeter opponents like Roger Yuan and Tiger Chen. The signature combat style of the Wick films combines intense close-quarters grappling and gunplay, frequently pitting a multi-tasking Wick against swarming opponents, his usual finishing move a shot or two to the head at point blank – though the presence here of enforcers in heavy body armour complicates matters, as does, at one point, being dunked in a swimming pool.

There are fitful enjoyments to be found in the execution of the film's set pieces, particularly the handling of some crotch-seeking attack dogs owned by a welcome Halle Berry, though nothing to match the élan of Yuen's own *Master Z: Ip Man Legacy* (2018) or the gonzo gusto of Jesse V. Johnson's *Triple Threat* (2019), to which Stahelski was at one time attached.

A hard rain: Keanu Reeves

Stahelski handles the action with a grim, efficient virtuosity that lacks real panache, while the most tiresome aspect of the franchise, the arcana surrounding the society of assassins, has been given an expanded role, the prime culprit in the film's none-too-lightly-worn two-hour-plus running time. The *Wick* movies have always lacked that ineffable but crucial element of charm, but *Parabellum* adds the sin of clutter – both narrative and otherwise – to their demerits. Stahelski, who doubled for the deceased Brandon Lee on Alex Proyas's *The Crow* (1994), seems to have acquired something of po-faced Proyas's fondness for laboured baroque atmospherics, shuttling between grandiose, slightly pompous interiors: lavish hotel lobbies, movie palaces and the reading room of the New York Public Library. A Morse code tip-tap of cranial shots, *Parabellum* is at one and the same time enervating and overstuffed, as a series that began with the almost laughably simplistic premise of a man hunting down the people responsible for killing his puppy now buckles under the accumulated weight of its own mythology.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Basil Iwanyk
Erica Lee
Screenplay
Derek Kolstad
Shay Hatten
Chris Collins
Marc Abrams
Story
Derek Kolstad
Based on characters created by Derek Kolstad
Director of Photography
Dan Laustsen
Edited by
Evan Schiff
Production Designer
Kevin Kavanaugh
Music
Tyler Bates
Joel J. Richard
Supervising Sound Editor
Mark Stoeckinger
Costume Designer
Luca Mosca
Supervising Stunt Coordinator
Scott Rogers

©Summit Entertainment, LLC
Production Companies
Lionsgate presents a Thunder Road Films production in association with 87eleven Productions
Executive Producers
Chad Stahelski
David Leitch
Joby Harold
Jeff Waxman

Cast
Keanu Reeves John Wick
Halle Berry Sofia
Laurence Fishburne Bowery King
Mark Dacascos Zero
Asia Kate Dillon the adjudicator
Lance Reddick Charon
Anjelica Huston the director
Ian McShane Winston
Saïd Taghmaoui the elder
Jerome Flynn Berrada
Jason Mantzoukas Tick Tock Man
Tobias Segal Earl

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

New York, present day. Hitman John Wick has been declared 'excommunicado' by the High Table, the organisation governing the world of killers, after committing an unsanctioned murder at the New York City Continental, an assassin safe haven. With a $14 million bounty on his head, he goes on the run. Helped by a figure from his past, the Director, he brokers passage to Casablanca. There he meets with onetime friend Sofia, who introduces him to the assassin Berrada. Wick hopes that Berrada will lead him to the Elder, a member of the High Table who can help him overturn his excommunicado status. Following a shoot-out with Berrada and his men, Wick finds the Elder in the desert; after slicing off his own finger in contrition, he is allowed to return to New York on a mission to kill Winston, the manager of the Continental. Declining to kill Winston, Wick stands with the staff of the Continental against a small army of High Table troops led by an assassin, Zero. The successful defence of the Continental prompts the Adjudicator to call for a parley, at which Winston double crosses and shoots Wick as proof of his loyalty to the High Table. The wounded Wick is rescued by the Bowery King, leader of a network of vagrant assassins, who proposes they embark on a war of revenge against the High Table.

Mari

United Kingdom 2018
Director: Georgia Parris

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Bobbi Jene Smith, the American dancer, choreographer and star of Georgia Parris's brilliant feature debut *Mari*, made public certain aspects of her private life in Elvira Lind's 2017 intimate documentary *Bobbi Jene*. In that film, Smith was wrestling with a move from Tel Aviv back to the US, leaving an established dance company and her boyfriend to produce her own choreography. In *Mari*, a fiction film, she plays a dancer, Charlotte, who is on the verge of producing her first choreographed ensemble piece and is thrown into a similar struggle between life and love. The film also picks up on the themes and central dilemma of writer-director Parris's 2016 short *Abandon*, a five-minute continuous take that, like *Mari*, follows an ambitious dancer at an emotional crossroads in the middle of rehearsals.

Charlotte's rehearsals, which are immediately revealed to be physically punishing and emotionally intense, are interrupted by two jolts, representing life and death. First there is a pregnancy test: we don't see the result, only the shock on Charlotte's face. Then the phone call that announces that her grandmother Mari is dying. Charlotte must leave rehearsals in London to be with her mother and sister at Mari's bedside in Dorset. As she spends time with her family, and pre-emptively grieves for her unconscious grandmother, Charlotte's thoughts inevitably flit to the rehearsals – what might be going astray, when she can get back. Charlotte's tetchy sister Lauren (Madeleine Worrall) can't resist prodding her about this, and the fact that she has rarely visited Mari. These moments of slightly forced conflict, and a fairly stagy phone call to establish the absence of Mari's father, are rare off-key notes in what is otherwise an acutely observed, tender family drama.

Mother Margot (beautifully played by Phoebe Nicholls) and the two daughters fret and mourn in Mari's low-lit home, where the dying woman is brought to life via similarly observant production design: cigarettes stashed in a knitting bag, empty yoghurt pots catching drips from the taps to water the plants. Cinematographer Adam Scarth here develops the theme of oppressive domestic confinement that he emphasised in *Apostasy* (2017). Although Mari's house is appealingly comfortable and filled with attractive objects, it's always slightly dim and, with the influx of visitors, awkwardly cramped. The photography and framing cross the line between cosiness and claustrophobia, as the three women strengthen their memories of Mari by proximity with these objects and walls, and are shot at low angles, through doorways and in dusky corners. This is when tensions erupt into anger most naturally. In the dying woman's home, they are far closer to Mari than when they are at her bedside in the clean and strip-lit hospice, but they are also slightly too close to each other.

Both here and back in London, Charlotte can find no respite. Intricate sound design frequently imposes external noise, of traffic and sirens, on private spaces, whether the professional sanctity of the rehearsal studio, or Mari's shrine-like home, disturbing Charlotte's fragile equilibrium. Caught between work and family duties, wherever she is, she always feels as if she is in the wrong place.

Written on the body: Bobbi Jene Smith

Mari was an artist, and her abstract paintings are points of brightness throughout the house. When insomniac Charlotte listens to an old radio recording in which her grandmother discusses her work, a clear parallel emerges between Mari's method, of layering paint on a canvas and scraping it back to reveal the image, and Charlotte's technique: she wants her dancers to "offer up" ideas that she can mould into the finished work. The implication – that Charlotte may not be an attentive granddaughter but she continues Mari's artistic lineage – is sealed by the older woman's nod of approval in a dream that Charlotte has. This arresting dream sequence acts like a false ending for the film – a climactic dance piece, featuring the full cast and a cascade of paper flowers – but the real conclusion, of course, is not so narratively neat.

In the dream, Charlotte is dancing, and it's this performance aspect that most distinguishes *Mari*. The film opens mid-rehearsal, with Charlotte coaxing her troupe into stronger, wider movements, and she continues to dance in Dorset. In her grandmother's armchair, twitching, stretching and flinging herself to the carpet; in a skate park, arching her back and sliding down the curved ramp. Smith's movements are vividly expressive, but they also underline Charlotte's insistent physicality: she pushes Margot and Lauren through warm-up exercises in the ward, pinches the soft skin on Mari's hand. When she dances we hear her pant and gasp, and even the sound of the air whipped by her cheeks as she turns her head. Her body was built to dance, but was it also built to bear a child? Charlotte's art, which preoccupies her mind and body, is also the obsession of this remarkable film, which searches for a truce between the warring demands of creativity and procreation. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Emma Duffy
Written by
Georgia Parris
Director of Photography
Adam Scarth
Editor
Napoleon Stratogiannakis
Production Designer
Bobbie Cousins
Composer/ Synthesiser Programming
Peter Gregson
Sound Designer
Gernot Fuhrmann
Costume Designer
Holly Rebecca
Choreography
Maxine Doyle

©Small Town Films Ltd
Production Companies
Film London, BBC Films, and BFI present a Small Town Films and Microwave production in association with Intermission and Boudica Films
Developed with the assistance of BBC Films
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Sam Cryer
Ian Davies
Rebecca Long
Lesley Kirkland
Maxine Doyle

Cast
Bobbi Jene Smith
Charlotte
Madeleine Worrall
Lauren
Peter Singh
Rohan
Phoebe Nicholls
Margot

In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
Verve Pictures

London, present day. Dancer Charlotte is rehearsing a new work that she is also choreographing. She takes a pregnancy test and is shocked by the result; her mother calls to tell her that her grandmother Mari is dying. Charlotte travels to Dorset, where Mari is in a hospice. Charlotte's mother and sister Lauren are there, with Lauren's husband Rohan and their son Billy. There is tension between Lauren and Charlotte because Charlotte has been too busy to visit Mari. Rohan tells Charlotte that Lauren recently had a miscarriage. Charlotte has trouble sleeping, and is worrying about her dance; she listens to an old recording of her grandmother discussing her own art, and dances when no one else is around. The sisters row when discussing the funeral arrangements and about Charlotte's pregnancy, which Lauren and Rohan have guessed. That night, Charlotte dreams she is dancing with her troupe and her family while Mari watches. The next morning, Mari dies, the three younger women at her side. Later that day, Charlotte visits the local abbey, and sits in a child's chair. She returns to the cottage and makes peace with her sister.

Never Look Away

Germany/Italy/USA/Czech Republic 2018
Director: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

When *The Lives of Others* was released in 2006 it was as if a new star had suddenly arrived in the 'kingdom of shadows'. A grand political drama about the surveillance of East Berlin residents by the GDR's secret police, it marked the emergence of a significant new talent in writer-director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. With the craft, sublimated intellectualism and charm to make European stories palatable to American audiences, the film won an Oscar, and its creator was effortlessly absorbed into the Hollywood great and good. Von Donnersmarck followed *The Lives of Others* with the slender 2010 Veneto comedy-thriller *The Tourist*, starring Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie. It was a kind of head-clearing exercise after the business of writing scripts about suicide, or so he said at the time. Would he ever come back?

He has, to an extent. The three-hour *Never Look Away* begins in an art gallery, and in some senses never leaves. We follow young Elisabeth (Saskia Rosendahl, radiant and doomed) in the Nazi Germany of 1937, on the surface a bright cheerleader for the Third Reich, but simultaneously and naively subverting it with her interest in 'degenerate art'. Her behaviour becomes erratic: she is prone to playing the piano naked and flirting with buses. Nakedness is a theme in the film, the disrobed flesh uniting the narrative's twin strands of illness and art. The women here are central but beatific, and not what you'd call especially well-rounded.

Elisabeth is sectioned and hospitalised, and her family – all by now signed-up Nazis – are deceived by the authorities over her eventual fate. Years later, the little boy of the household, Elisabeth's nephew Kurt, has grown up to become an artist. By a series of coincidences, he meets and falls in love with a girl, Ellie (Paula Beer), who unbeknown to him is the daughter of the doctor of responsible for his aunt's death.

The Nazi doctor at the centre of the story, Professor Seeband, is played by Sebastian Koch. Tall and of noble mien, Koch is the consummate Donnersmarck player. As the playwright Georg Dreyman in *The Lives of Others*, he was the recipient of institutionalised villainy; here he is its weapon, a familiar Donnersmarck character in that he is an alpha male who is extremely good at his job but morally askew. After Kurt and Ellie marry, Seeband's contempt for his son-in-law's interest in art is matched only by his eugenics-led disgust at his own genetic line being defiled by marrying into the family of a woman he once condemned to death. The scene where he explains to a Russian officer why the mentally ill should be exterminated because the country "can't afford" them has a contemporary 'austerity' resonance.

One of the big conceits of the film is that Nazi Germany and Soviet East Germany are essentially *the same*. It's not an observation of great subtlety – it borders on the banal. More sincere is the general life exhortation not to give in to second-best – the students who tell Kurt both in East and West Germany to content himself with second-tier success are an important component here; and, indeed, Professor Seeband's 'be best' insistence is a key motivator for the artist who will finally be his nemesis.

War paint: Tom Schilling

Mention must be made of the film's excellent art design (supervised by Robert Reblin), which has to create paintings of sufficient quality not to be ludicrous – when Kurt makes the transition from bad art to good, it is an amazingly difficult scene to pull off. Kurt, played with stoic placidity by Tom Schilling, is something of a blank canvas. Having excelled at state-mandated art in East Germany, he makes the switch to US-dominated modern art when he defects to the West in 1961. But why have an invented 'Professor Antonius van Verten' as his mentor when everything about him is a direct lift from the life of Joseph Beuys? Why not simply call the character Joseph Beuys? The answer seems to be that the film is loosely based on the life of German artist Gerhard Richter, who initially co-operated with von Donnersmarck but has apparently disowned the finished work.

The title *Never Look Away* is the exhortation of the tragic Elisabeth to the young Kurt. Never flinch, she says to Kurt.. Look. The cinematography by Caleb Deschanel (*The Right Stuff*), who received an Oscar nomination for its piercing scope. It is crisp and clear and orderly, and at the right moments, entirely dreamlike.

Never Look Away seems a synthesis of von Donnersmarck's two earlier films, not as bad as *The Tourist* and not as good as *The Lives of Others*. It's beautiful to look at and it resounds with rich, operatic themes of war and coincidence. But the Hollywood praise has been hyperbolic. It's a series of bright masculine toasts to success – with slightly flat German beer – from a director whose brilliant debut has yet to find a worthy successor.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
Jan Mojto
Quirin Berg
Max Wiedemann
Christiane Henckel von Donnersmarck
Written by
Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
Director of Photography
Caleb Deschanel
Editing
Patricia Rommel
Production Design
Silke Buhr
Original Score Composed by
Max Richter
Production Sound Mixer
Matthias Richter
Costume Designer
Gabrielle Binder

©Pergamon Film GmbH & Co. KG/ Wiedemann & Berg Film GmbH & Co. KG

Production Companies
A film by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
A Pergamon Film production
A Wiedemann & Berg Film production
Presented by Buena Vista International (Germany)
In co-production with Beta Cinema, ARD Degeto, Bayerischer Rundfunk
In association with Sky Deutschland, Rai Cinema, Sony Pictures Classics, ARTE
Supported by MBB - Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, FilmFernsehFonds Bayern, Film- und Medienstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung, Filmförderungsanstalt, Deutsche Filmförderfonds, Tschechischen Staatlichen Kinematographie Fonds, Czech Film Fund
Produced by W.O.A. Film GmbH

Cast
Tom Schilling Kurt Barnert
Sebastian Koch Professor Carl Seeband
Paula Beer Ellie Seeband
Saskia Rosendahl Elisabeth May
Oliver Masucci Professor Antonius van Verten
Cai Cohrs Kurt Barnert aged 6
Ina Weisse Martha Seeband
Evgeny Sidikhin NKWD Major Murawjow
Mark Zak Murawjow's interpreter
Ulricke C. Tscharre Frau Hellthaler
Bastian Trost Doctor Michaelis
Hans-Uwe Bauer Professor Horst Grimma
Hanno Koffler Günther Preusser
David Schütter Adrian Schimmel/ Finck
Franz Pätzold Max Seifert
Hinnerk Schönemann Werner Blaschke
Jeanette Hain Waltraut Barnert
Jörg Schüttauf Johann Barnert
Johanna Gastdorf Grandmother Malvine
Florian Bartholomäi Gunther May
Jonas Dassler Ehrenfried May
Ben Becker Otto, foreman
Lars Eidinger Heiner Kerstens, exhibition guide

In Colour [1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Modern Films

German theatrical release
Werk ohne Autor

Dresden, 1937. A young woman, Elisabeth, takes her nephew Kurt to a Nazi exhibition of prohibited decadent art. Far from joining in the spirit of condemnation, Elisabeth quietly enthuses to the little boy. Thanks to her Aryan beauty, Elisabeth is chosen to give a bouquet of flowers to Hitler when he visits her town. However, she begins to behave erratically and is committed to a mental hospital, where she is sterilised and then gassed by the Nazi authorities. Dresden is bombed and Germany falls to the Allies. Professor Seeband, the doctor responsible for Elisabeth's death, falls into the hands of the Russians, but finds a protector when he helps the camp commander with his wife's life-threatening childbirth. Seeband prospers in Soviet East Germany.

Kurt grows up to be an artist. He meets and falls in love with Seeband's daughter Ellie, unaware of the doctor's role in his aunt's death. The pair defect to the West just before the Berlin Wall is erected. Though Kurt is accepted at a prestigious school in Düsseldorf, he struggles with his art. Family photographs provide inspiration, and he begins to paint images of Elisabeth and Nazi criminality. He becomes a success just as the truth about Ellie's father begins to emerge.

Pokémon Detective Pikachu

USA/Japan 2019
Director: Rob Letterman
Certificate PG 104m 20s

Reviewed by Alex Dudok de Wit

Pokémon's universe, which contains 21 anime features, more than 1,000 television episodes and whole galaxies of videogames, rivals even Marvel's for size. Two decades on from the height of Pokémania, it continues to accrue fans. This film, which drops the Pokémon critters into a live-action world, has a lot of people to please.

Pokémon Detective Pikachu performs several balancing acts. It addresses children and young adults, newcomers and nostalgists, even different generations of enthusiasts. It is the first Pokémon movie of truly blockbuster proportions, and its most delicate task is to reinvent the largely mute Pikachu as a suitable lead without sacrificing the cuteness that makes him so bankable.

The setting is Ryme City, a hectic cosmopolis in which people and Pokémon coexist in enforced harmony. A tragedy sets humans Tim (Justice Smith) and Lucy (Kathryn Newton) on a mission, which in turn leads them to discover the dark truth behind the city's social engineering. They are accompanied by an odd specimen of Pikachu, who for tenuous narrative reasons is both an experienced sleuth and fluent in English. Casting the virtuous electric pseudo-mouse as a detective – a notion borrowed from a 2016 videogame – is amusing in itself, and while the real investigating work is left to Tim and Lucy, Pikachu lights up the proceedings with sparks of wisecracking humour.

He is voiced by Ryan Reynolds, who plays the role like a sanitised version of his antihero in the Marvel self-parody *Deadpool*. His sardonic, motormouth, faux-offhand delivery echoes many animated characters of the irony age (think Ted or Bojack Horseman). Thankfully, though, this Pikachu doesn't veer too far off brand: due partly to a plot turn that gives him amnesia, he retains much of his sweet guilelessness. The multi-authored script respects its subject's place in culture – it is no *Peter Rabbit*-style travesty.

Credit goes also to the animators, supervised by Erik Nordby (who previously worked with director Rob Letterman on 2015's *Goosebumps*). Pikachu is a fantasy animal whose appearance was defined within the limited parameters of anime, and translating him into naturalist CGI was a tall order, but Nordby's team succeeds. Pikachu's rabbit-like movements and expressions – motion-captured from Reynolds – are plausible. In general, the visuals never stray into the uncanny valley. The wildly popular augmented reality game *Pokémon Go* may have primed audiences to accept this hybrid world.

Pokémon have always had something of the grotesque about them, and the film exploits this. Ryme City is a well-conceived cross between Zootopia and a *noir*-ish dystopia, a fitting backdrop to the creatures' new PG incarnations. The sight of a Jigglypuff crooning in a dingy dive bar will tickle fans; others can at least enjoy such scenes as a bit of absurdist fun. When the narrative leaves this realm, however, it loses its way. A lengthy second act in a genetic research facility harks back to *Pokémon: The First Movie* (1998), while also foregrounding the human drama. Smith and Newton do their best to inject emotion into boilerplate young-adult scenarios, but endless twists make a nonsense of their story, and Pikachu's absence is felt.

Detective Pikachu is chiefly interested in displaying the charms of its intellectual property, and it does this well. It is silly and good-natured enough to appeal beyond the fanbase, while its gentle subversion of Pokémon lore opens a new chapter in the franchise. Here's hoping the sequel, already in development, will flesh out the humans. S

Pokémon: Detective Pikachu

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mary Parent
Cale Boyter
Katakami Hidenaga
Screenplay
Dan Hernandez
Benji Samit
Rob Letterman
Derek Connolly
Story
Dan Hernandez
Benji Samit
Nicole Perlman
Based on the 'Detective Pikachu' video game developed by Creatures Inc.
Director of Photography
John Mathieson
Films Editors
Mark Sanger
James Thomas
Production Designer
Nigel Phelps
Music
Henry Jackman
Production Sound Mixer
John Midgley
Costume Designer
Suzie Harman
Visual Effects
MPC
Framestore
Visual Effects & Animation
Image Engine
Stunt Co-ordinator
Franklin Henson

©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Legendary

Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures and Legendary Pictures present a Legendary Pictures production
In association with Toho Co., Ltd
A Rob Letterman film
Executive Producers
Joe Caracciolo, Jr
Ali Mendes
Ishihara Tsunekazu
Okubo Kenji
Miyahara Toshio
Matsuoka Hiro
Ueda Koji
Film Extracts
Home Alone (1990)

Cast
Ryan Reynolds voice of Detective Pikachu
Justice Smith Tim Goodman
Kathryn Newton Lucy Stevens
Suki Waterhouse Ms Norman
Omar Chaparro Sebastian
Chris Geere Roger Clifford
Rita Ora Doctor Ann Laurent
Ken Watanabe Lieutenant Hide Yoshida
Bill Nighy Howard Clifford
Otani Ikeu voice of Pikachu

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D
Some screenings in Screen X

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

Shy twentysomething Tim is summoned to Ryme City, where he is told that his estranged father Harry, a detective, has been killed. The city is run by Howard Clifford, a plutocrat who credits Pokémon with treating his disease; only here do humans coexist harmoniously with Pokémon, rather than training them to fight. Tim encounters a Pikachu, whose speech – unusually – he understands. Pikachu reveals that he worked with Harry, whom he believes to be alive. Teaming up with journalist Lucy, they investigate a mysterious powder found in Harry's flat, which enrages any Pokémon inhaling it.

They learn that scientists are secretly fabricating the powder by extracting the DNA of the powerful Pokémon Mewtwo, under Clifford's orders. Harry was apparently killed, and Pikachu's memory wiped, while probing this conspiracy. Clifford begins to fuse his mind with Mewtwo's body and sprinkle the powder on Ryme City's population, believing that this will enhance everyone's physical capacities. Tim foils his plans and Clifford is arrested. Mewtwo explains that Harry's spirit remains within Pikachu. He is reincarnated in his original body, and Tim moves in with him.

Prisoners of the Moon

Ireland/United Kingdom 2019
Director: Johnny Gogan

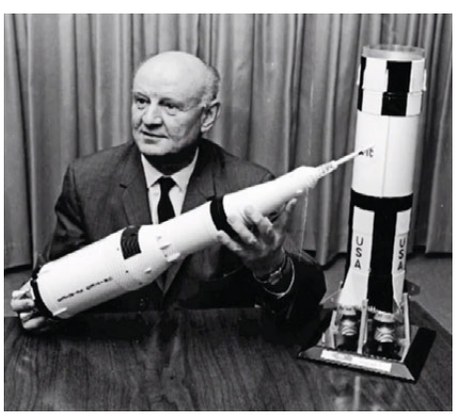
Reviewed Hannah McGill

A messy take on a murky subject, *Prisoners of the Moon* uses re-enactments, archive footage, book extracts and interviews to assemble its story of the Nazi war criminal and rocket scientist Arthur Rudolph. Part of the team that developed the V-2 rocket, Rudolph oversaw slave labour at the brutal Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp, where the missiles were built and where hundreds of thousands perished. Despite his role there, Rudolph was one of numerous German scientists and engineers who were housed and protected by the US government at the end of the war in exchange for their contributions to its own missile and space programmes.

Enthusiasm clearly powers this self-styled 'creative documentary', which hops between Rudolph's apprehension in old age and an account of the V-2 project and its aftermath. Many of the interviewees are fascinating. The overall effect, however, recalls the experience of being served a 'deconstructed' dish in a self-conscious restaurant: you rather wish that someone had just constructed it. From the beginning, storytelling is disordered and jumpy, and snippets of interviews are thrown in without identification of the speakers, as if to trail juicier elaboration later on. It's an approach that seems to be modelled on successful documentaries such as *Man on Wire* (2008) and *The Imposter* (2012); but if confused identities and vertiginous uncertainty were a thematic fit for those tales of charismatic troublemakers flying in the face of propriety and convention, a cut-up thriller approach feels less appropriate for a story that's building up to showing us real concentration-camp footage.

The release of information is also straightforwardly confusing: it takes an extraordinarily long time for the film to make clear that it's exploring the connection between Nazi engineers and the US space programme; archive and audio footage sweeps past without clear details of its provenance; both interviewees and major players in the historical narrative continue to be patchily identified; voiceover, otherwise absent, suddenly crops up at the end, and uses the first person ("I have come to believe that in the icy domain of state reasoning, anything – absolutely anything – is possible") without telling us who is speaking.

Why has a good story been told in such a tangled manner? It seems to be the consequence of an excess of material, and perhaps of



Slave trade: Arthur Rudolph

enthusiasm: by including both courtroom re-enactments based on an immigration hearing, which are based on 2009 radio play *The Rocket's Trail* by Nick Snow, and the interview material, director Johnny Gogan has simply overcrowded his film. When you have extraordinary interviewees such as Eli Rosenbaum – who exposed numerous Nazis during his time as director of the US Department of Justice Office of Special Investigations – giving over so much screen time to rather ponderous scenes from the end of Rudolph's life is a questionable choice. In terms of 'creative documentary', then, *Prisoners of the Moon* is inescapably flawed. As the airing of a story that strikes the heart with its stark juxtaposition of the best and worst of the 20th century, however, it is significant – particularly in terms of the counter it provides to cinema's more glorified and less questioning accounts of America's adventures in space.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Johnny Gogan
Written by Johnny Gogan, Nick Snow
Dramatisation adapted from the play *Rocket Man* by Nick Snow
Jean Michel dialogue adapted from *Dora: The Nazi Concentration Camp Where Modern Space Technology Was Born...* by Jean Michel, Louis Nucera
Directors of Photography *Dramatisation:* Fionn Rodgers *Documentary:* Johnny Gogan
Editor Patrick O'Rourke
Production Designer Michael Cummins
Original Score Steve Wickham
Sound Recordist Patrick O'Rourke
Costume Designer Amy O'Hara

©Prisoners of the Moon DAC
Production Companies Bandit Films present in association with Fis Éireann/Screen Ireland Developed with the assistance of Fis Éireann/Screen Ireland and Leitrim Enterprise Office A Bandit Films production in association with Fis Éireann/Screen Ireland and Lucataire Limited
Film Extracts *Frau im Mond/Woman in the Moon* (1929)

Cast
Garrick Hagon General Medaris
Cathy Belton Barbara Kulaszka
Alan Devine Donald McIntosh
Matt Addis Neal Sher
Marty Rea Jean Michel
Jim Norton Arthur Rudolph

In Colour [1.78:1]

Distributor Jonny Tull/Bandit Films

A documentary with dramatic re-enactments. In 1990, an elderly German man, Arthur Rudolph, flies from Hamburg to Toronto. He is detained at Pearson international airport by immigration officials. A hearing is held at which it is determined that Rudolph is a former member of the Nazi party who personally oversaw the use of slave labour at the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp during World War II. Rudolph's level of personal responsibility is disputed by his lawyer. Interviewees explain how Rudolph led the engineers who worked on the development of the V-2 rocket and was in charge of its production at Dora-Mittelbau.

At the end of the war, under a scheme known first as Operation Backfire and then Operation Paperclip, Rudolph and his team are seconded to the US to continue their work on rocket technology, helping to develop the framework for the Apollo space programme. In the 1970s, new legislation enables the pursuit of those Nazi war criminals still at liberty; later, a book by Jean Michel records the full horror of the Dora camp. Rudolph renounces his US citizenship and returns to Germany rather than face investigation. At the Canadian hearing, new evidence confirms that far from being a reluctant or unwitting witness to slave labour, Rudolph himself recommended and instigated it. He is deemed persona non grata in Canada. An appeal fails; Rudolph dies in 1996.

Prophecy

United Kingdom 2018
Director: Charlie Paul

A brush with the divine: Peter Howson

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

"I've got a role," says Scottish artist Peter Howson in the absorbing *Prophecy*, "to enlighten people." Since he converted to Christianity in 2000, his work, in oils and pastels, has become increasingly religious as well as politically controversial. Here we watch him working on a vast new canvas, which features a crucifixion amid myriad other characters and references. There's a US flag and a flag of Isis; a crowd of desperate and violent onlookers. There's his daughter Lucie, who appears in many of his paintings but here has her back turned to the spectator, displaying scars that Howson identifies as stigmata.

Charlie Paul's documentary is fascinating for two reasons. First, it takes us into the technical heart of the painting process, the mixing and application of colour. Compelling time-lapse montages show us the works evolving with each layer of paint or glaze. Howson discusses how he balances his composition, his favourite colours (cadmium red and cobalt blue), and how to manipulate light sources. Second, Howson has his own life story to tell. He remembers the first time he saw an El Greco, and his favourite representation of Christ, in Cecil B. DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927), which Paul projects over Bible pages as Howson speaks. Then there was the time he overdosed and saw the gates of Hell ("I felt as if I'd been infested with evil").

In his study, Howson opens the Bible; he discusses Greek mythology, and there are several volumes on Goya visible as well. He remembers Lucie's birth, and how he was too out of it on drink and drugs to experience it properly. We meet her too; like her father she has Asperger's syndrome, among other conditions – he calls his Asperger's his "demon". We also see some of the work Howson created as the Imperial War Museum's official artist for the Bosnian war – the scenes of rape and violence are hard to look at, and Howson recalls that he was a changed man afterwards, with failing mental health and a broken marriage.

There's an attempt here to show the full life-cycle of a work of art. "At the end of the painting," Howson says twice, "the final brushstroke really is the end of existence." But the project extends before and after the process of applying oils to canvas. Howson's life story and opinions, his bookshelves and even his collection of paints all speak to the inspiration for the work. And when at last the canvas is finished and signed, Howson's art dealer Matthew Flowers takes the artist's place on the soundtrack as we see the painting shipped to London, exhibited and sold.

Captions before the credits give a suggestion of how very expensive Howson's work is, but the film emphasises the artisanal aspect of his métier, the physical and emotional toil that goes into each work. He sighs and ponders the canvas, constantly adding and revising the design; mixes and searches for paint – the tubes are, he says, like "naughty children", hiding from view on purpose. He has confined himself to his home studio without a phone so that he can concentrate for long periods, and keeps himself going with sandwiches, cigarettes and espresso, though at one point, in extremis, he "murders" a Burger King. It's all hard graft and seems fairly unrelenting: when Howson comments that he needs to rework a section, he reflects, "Sadly, it means more work," before clarifying that he's lucky really, and it's not as if he has a job in a factory.

In the film's closing moments there is a sharp cut from two men in suits, apparently shaking hands over the sale of Howson's latest in a London gallery, to the artist himself, casually dressed and taking a breather in the middle of a dog walk, perched on a street bollard, smoking a cigarette. He looks so like the hulking, working-class men that populate his pictures that this seemingly candid shot is a portrait of the artist just as much as the scenes of him working and discussing his art.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Lucy Paul
Filmed by Charlie Paul
Editor Joby Gee
Art Department Chris Warren
Sound Re-recording Mixer George Foulgham

©Mackenzie Studio Ltd
Production Companies Itch present Supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland
Executive Producers Lucy Paul, Alistair Currie *for Creative Scotland:* Mark Thomas *for BBC Scotland:* Ewan Angus

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Koenig Pictures

A documentary portrait in which the Scottish artist Peter Howson discusses his life and work while creating a new painting. It is a large canvas, featuring a crucifixion, a crowd and a host of contemporary and classical references. His daughter Lucie introduces herself. Howson finally finishes his canvas and signs it. The work is shipped to London and sold to a private collector.

Rocketman

USA/United Kingdom 2019
Director: Dexter Fletcher
Certificate 15 121m 7s

Reviewed by Rebecca Harrison

The doors open. Light fills the hallway. A demon in silhouette strides with a swagger that radiates all the way from his enormous feathered wings to the soles of his platform shoes. The wild-child figure glistens with rhinestones, eyes framed by sequinned hearts. He pauses. He addresses the rehab group that he has just interrupted. And then, looking straight to camera, reveals his devil-may-care attitude to be artifice. "My name is Elton Hercules John and I'm an alcoholic." He is also a self-confessed cocaine, sex and shopping addict, a fragile man whose difficulty finding love is the narrative impetus for the film. He is Rocketman, and his words set the scene for a movie that delivers on the sex and drugs always promised in stories about rock 'n' roll.

With the group therapy session at the core of Dexter Fletcher's film, Elton (Taron Egerton) reflects on his transformation from child piano prodigy Reggie Dwight into a global superstar. Encountering one another at pivotal moments throughout the film, young Reggie and world-weary Elton help one another face parental abandonment, domestic abuse and the challenges of being a gay man in a homophobic world. However, this is not a film drawn from the heteronormative playbook of gay suffering. It ramps up the camp to 11, throws on some sequinned specs and sparks fireworks of joy in glitzy song-and-dance routines that rework Elton's greatest hits.

While the film does occasionally feel contrived – the early childhood scenes are formulaic – the musical numbers are *Rocketman*'s greatest strength, and they add unexpected surrealism. Beautifully rendered visual effects are accompanied by dizzying rotating cameras, which give the impression that the film apparatus itself is dancing to the music. There is also a wonderfully orchestrated sequence in which

Still standing: Taron Egerton

Elton is rescued from a suicide attempt, attended by a medical team, and seamlessly repackaged into one of his trademark flamboyant costumes to launch into his next show. But what is most remarkable about the film is its insistence on celebrating sexuality. Men kiss, caress and have sex with one another; a splendidly camp aesthetic draws on drag and the ballroom culture of 1980s New York. The narrative is positive about finding love, friendship and family life as a gay man. This is a major 'at last' moment for big-budget Hollywood movies. *Rocketman* is out and proud.

Egerton's overall performance as Elton is solid, and with excellent makeup and costuming he excels in moments of insecurity and exhilaration. The absolute lack of chemistry, though, between Egerton and Richard Madden (who plays Elton's manager and former partner John Reid), is a letdown in an otherwise uplifting film that sees the singer make peace with the demons overwhelming him both on and off stage.

In a diamanté swirl of outrageous costumes, *Rocketman* makes clear that its heart is in the right place. It's a dazzling, genre-bending, musical biopic, and if you come asking for more than just another generic Sunday matinee, you won't be disappointed.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Matthew Vaughn
David Furnish
Adam Bohling
David Reid
Written by
Lee Hall
Director of Photography
George Richmond
Edited by
Chris Dickens
Production Designer
Marcus Rowland
Original Score
Matthew Margeson
Supervising Sound Editors
Danny Sheehan
Matthew Collinge
Costume Designer
Julian Day
Stunt Coordinator
James O'Dee
Choreography
Adam Murray

©Paramount Pictures Corporation
Production Companies
Paramount Pictures presents in association with New Republic Pictures a Marv Films/Rocket Pictures production
Executive Producers
Elton John
Claudia Vaughn [i.e. Claudia Schiffer]
Brian Oliver
Steve Hamilton Shaw
Michael Gracey

Cast
Taron Egerton
Elton John
Jamie Bell
Bernie Taupin
Richard Madden
John Reid
Gemma Jones
Ivy
Bryce Dallas Howard
Sheila
Stephen Graham
Dick James
Steven Mackintosh
Stanley
Tate Donovan
Doug Weston
Charlie Rowe
Ray Williams
Matthew Illesley
young Reggie
Kit Connor
older Reggie
Pete O'Hanlon
Bobby

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

Addicted to sex, drugs and alcohol, musical icon Elton John arrives at a rehab clinic. As a therapist begins to ask him questions during a group therapy session, Elton reveals his life story, which we see in flashbacks and musical song-and-dance sequences.

Suburban London, the early 1950s. A young Reggie Dwight is ignored by his warring parents and finds solace only in his relationship with his grandmother and his love for playing piano. Displaying great talent from an early age, he soon embarks on a musical career that enables him to escape and become a global celebrity. He and writing partner Bernie Taupin strike a record deal. Elton recognises that he is gay and begins a destructive relationship with manager John Reid. The pressures of fame and the toxic romance take their toll, and Elton becomes increasingly reliant on narcotics to help him cope. His relationship breaks down; feeling unloved, he attempts suicide, which leads to a surreal encounter with his childhood self. A failed marriage and many more tour dates later, he finally realises that he needs to seek help.

Back in the rehab clinic, in a fantasy sequence, Elton confronts each of his family members and John, before making peace with the young Reggie. Bernie arrives to renew their friendship and gives Elton the inspiration to return to music. A musical montage shows the aftermath of Elton's recovery leading to a happy family life and success with both creative and charitable endeavours.

A Season in France

France 2017
Director: Mahamat-Saleh Haroun
Certificate 12A 100m 37s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Two years on from its first UK screening (in the 2017 LFF), Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's film remains entirely topical in its empathy with refugees looking for asylum in Europe but no more inspired or inspiring than it seemed at the time. The title deliberately echoes Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer* (*A Season in Hell*) because that's what the film chronicles: two African refugees (one the single parent to two young children), both men with pasts as university lecturers, are defeated by the impersonal and inhumane French asylum-application system, driving one of them to suicide and the other to 'disappear' with his kids. Both men have naturalised-French girlfriends who try to give them moral and practical support, but the stresses they're under leave both unable to sustain erections when they try to have sex. Haroun was previously best known here for *Un homme qui crie* (*A Screaming Man*, a Cannes prizewinner in 2010), an equally one-dimensional story of a man pushed into desperate and self-damaging actions by an African civil war. Haroun himself (originally from Chad) has lived in France since 1982, but his account of the refugee experience owes nothing to more nuanced and engaging movies about refugee issues from Aki Kaurismäki, Michael Winterbottom and others.

Haroun's strategy is to focus narrowly on the miseries of two middle-aged Francophone men who have fled the civil war in the Central African Republic to seek asylum in France. He loads the dice somewhat by making both of them intellectuals (there's an implication that they taught in the same university in Bangui), if only to stress that educational qualifications cut no ice with immigration officers. The protagonist Abbas (Eriq Ebouaney, recommended to Haroun by Brian De Palma) lost his beloved wife to a gunshot as they escaped – Haroun rather crudely stresses how much he misses her by having her silent phantom pop up in his dreams twice – and he struggles to be a capable and providing single parent to their two young children; the boy at one point accuses Abbas of lying to them when

Into the void: Sandrine Bonnaire, Eriq Ebouaney

he said he had friends in France who would help them. His friend Etienne (the musician Bibi Tanga) lives alone in a wooden shack which is burnt down by racist thugs just after he receives his deportation notice; he responds despairingly by setting himself ablaze in the asylum office, an episode inspired by a real-life incident in 2014.

A Season in France is the polar opposite of a film like Ken Loach's *Ladybird Ladybird*. There are no hysterical confrontations with bureaucrats, and there's no attempt to delve into the arcane workings of the asylum-appeals process. Instead, Haroun fills the screen with domestic minutiae, trusting his all-round-excellent cast to suggest the inner turmoils which afflict the characters. Trouble is, this approach yields nothing but empathy with Abbas, Etienne and their girlfriends and dependants – an empathy which most viewers of the film will feel before they watch it. It's not Haroun's job to find solutions, but a little more analysis wouldn't have gone amiss.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Florence Stern
Screenplay
Mahamat-Saleh Haroun
Photography
Mathieu Giombini
Editor
Jean-François Elie
Art Director
Eric Barboza
Original Music
Wasis Diop
Sound
Dana Farzanehpour
Costumes
Agnès Noden

©Pili Films, ARTE France Cinéma
Production Companies
Pili Films presents
In co-production with ARTE France Cinéma
With the participation of ARTE France, Canal+, Ciné+, TV5 Monde
With the support of Région Île-de-France in partnership with the CNC
A film by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun
A Pili Films, ARTE France Cinéma co-production
With the participation of Images de la Diversité - Commissariat Général à l'Égalité des Territoires - Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée

Cast
Eriq Ebouaney
Abbas Mahajir
Sandrine Bonnaire
Carole Blaszac
Aalayna Lys
Asma
Ibrahim Burama
Darboe
Yacine
Sandra Nkake
Madeleine
Bibi Tanga
Etienne Bamingui
Léonie Simaga
Martine
Régine Conas
Régine
Khampha Thammavongsa
Thamma

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

French theatrical title
Une saison en France

Paris, 2016. Former university teacher Abbas Mahadjir and his children Yacine and Asma are refugees from the Central African Republic, appealing for asylum in France; Abbas's wife Madeleine was shot by a militia as they fled the civil war in their country. His closest friends in France are fellow refugee Etienne Bamingui (another academic, now living in a shack) and Carole Blaszac, who helps Abbas with the French bureaucracy and becomes his girlfriend. Just as news comes that Abbas has been refused asylum, leaving him one last court of appeal, he and the kids are forced to move from a comfortable borrowed apartment into cramped rented rooms. Despairing of his prospects and of ever being a good father to his kids, Abbas angrily quits his casual job on a market fruit-and-veg stall. A letter informs him that he has 30 days to leave France. Etienne receives the same letter and finds his shack burnt to cinders by rightwing thugs; he rejects consolation from Abbas and sets himself on fire at the asylum office. Abbas and Etienne's girlfriend Martine visit him in hospital. Abbas is evicted for falling behind with rent, and moves with the kids to Carole's place in the suburbs. He learns that Etienne has died. He and the kids hide when the police come looking for him; while Carole goes to the police station, he and the kids disappear. Carole searches for him at the site of the former 'Jungle' camp in Calais, without success.

The Secret Life of Pets 2

United Kingdom/Japan 2019
Director: Chris Renaud
Certificate U 85m 56s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Given my surly *Sight & Sound* review of the first *The Secret Life of Pets* cartoon in 2016, it seems only fair to point out that it became one of the most commercially successful animated films of the decade, taking more money internationally than Pixar's critically praised *Inside Out* (2015) or *Coco* (2017). The film's jokes about pets, whether conforming to type – an utterly self-absorbed fat cat – or breaking them – a poodle who loves heavy metal – plainly translate well around the world, though I found the film a dull runaround.

The sequel changes the format a little, but not in a way to win over viewers who weren't convinced the first time. Instead of a single narrative, the sequel gives us three concurrent stories, each with different animals, and switches between them annoyingly. In one, the New York dogs from the first film are taken to the country, where timid terrier Max learns self-confidence from a gruff sheepdog voiced by Harrison Ford. (There's no doubt that Ford's character is really a cowboy, as he was in the *Star Wars* films.) Back in the city, the hare-brained white rabbit Snowball (Kevin Hart) is caught up in a bid to rescue a gentle tiger from a cruel zoo, while Gidget, a diminutive but feisty Pom dog, must save a treasured chew toy from a roomful of deranged cats.

Unsurprisingly, these strands come together in a manic last act – the tiger's still in danger – that is busy but uninspired, like the film as a whole. It should be stressed that CG cartoons don't *have* to be Pixar tearjerkers. There's always room for silly, funny comedies such as *Minions* (2015), by *Pets* studio Illumination Entertainment, even if they're hard to sustain at feature length. The finale of *Pets 2* involves a lot of running on and inside a circus train, which may remind viewers of the climax of *Paddington 2* (2017) but also recalls the more spontaneous cartoon nonsense in one of the most underrated DreamWorks cartoons, *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted* (2012).

Earlier on, *Pets 2* has some good moments, such as a scene in a vet's reception featuring hilariously disturbed animals, including a cat with eyes to rival Marty Feldman's. There's also an interesting reversal for Max, who meets his owner's new child at the start of the film and becomes parentally protective of it. When they go out on the street together, Max's anxiety for the infant means that he suddenly sees all the dangers – passing cars, for instance – as a human parent would. Indeed, fear is unexpectedly central to the film, especially in an effective scene where Ford's sheepdog forces Max to clamber around a perilous cliff to save a lost lamb.

The Secret Life of Pets 2

It all looks duly shiny on the big screen, but *Pets 2* still feels more like a cobbled-together collection of TV scripts than a proper film. One of its main points of interest isn't on screen at all; it's the all too understandable substitution of one actor behind the microphone. Max was voiced in the first film by comedian Louis CK, before reports of his sexual misconduct made him a #MeToo pariah. In the sequel, Max is voiced, well enough, by Patton Oswalt. It's not clear if Louis CK had already recorded his part when the switch was made, but it's unlikely that Max's facial animation would have been synched to his voice at that point. Assuming that's true, the replacement of the disgraced lead actor would have been far easier than it was in 2017's live-action *All the Money in the World*, where Christopher Plummer took the place of Kevin Spacey.

Credits and Synopsis

Co-director
Jonathan del Val
Produced by
Chris Meledandri
Janet Healy
Written by
Brian Lynch
Edited by
Tiffany Hillkurtz
Production Designer
Colin Stimpson
Music
Alexandre Desplat
Supervising Sound Editor
Dennis Leonard
Animation Directors
Julien Soret
Gwénolé Oulc'hen
Patrick Delage
©Universal Studios
Production Companies
Universal Pictures presents a Chris Meledandri production
Illumination presents
Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./ Fuji Television Network, Inc.
Executive Producer
Brett Hoffman

Voice Cast
Patton Oswalt
Max
Kevin Hart
Snowball
Eric Stonestreet
Duke
Jenny Slate
Gidget
Tiffany Haddish
Daisy
Lake Bell
Chloe
Ellie Kemper
Katie, Max's owner
Harrison Ford
Rooster

Dolby Atmos/DTS:X
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

New York, the present. Timid terrier Max is about to be taken on holiday by his owners. He entrusts his favourite chew toy to his female neighbour Gidget, a Pomeranian who adores him. Another neighbour, a manic white rabbit called Snowball who thinks he's a superhero, is told about a white tiger being treated cruelly in a circus. Snowball sets out to save it, though a more sensible shih-tzu does the actual rescuing. Meanwhile, Max, who's developed neurotic tendencies, is taught self-confidence by a sheepdog called Rooster on the farm where he's staying. Gidget loses the chew toy, which falls into an apartment full of feral cats. To retrieve the toy, she poses as a cat and becomes their leader.

Finally, when the villainous circus owner recaptures the tiger, Gidget and Snowball work with Max, now returned from holiday, to rescue it.

Support the Girls

USA 2018
Director: Andrew Bujalski

See Feature on page 30

Reviewed by Adam Cook

Once proclaimed the 'godfather of mumblecore', Bostonian (and current Austinite) filmmaker Andrew Bujalski is now six features into an unpredictable career that began to distance itself from this initial moniker with 2013's inventive and inspired *Computer Chess*. His latest, *Support the Girls*, continues along the more commercial trajectory set by *Results* (2015), but if anything Bujalski has refined his independent vision and knack for crafting convincing lived-in worlds for sharply drawn characters. A workplace comedy on its surface, *Support the Girls* is, at its core, genuinely serious and nuanced in its concerns with American working-class life. Fluent in the particularities of the milieu it inhabits, Bujalski has fashioned a humanist ode to worker solidarity, an illustration of inequality with considered political inclinations that is nevertheless refreshingly light on its feet.

The film follows a tumultuous day in the life of Lisa (Regina Hall), the manager of Double Whammies, a low-rent sports bar located just off an anonymous Texan highway overpass and staffed by young female servers in revealing uniforms. Arriving in the morning to help train a new set of 'Whammies girls', Lisa discovers that a man has become stuck in the vent just above the safe-room during an attempted robbery – and things don't really go uphill from there. A warm, dignified woman who takes pride in her job even as everything about it seems to contradict her character, Lisa treats her employees like family and her customers with respect. Kindly but tough, she carries herself like someone with a realistic knowledge that what she may be worth and what the world owes her aren't exactly similar.

It's one thing after another, and Lisa has to manage the bar while deflecting her aggressive boss Cubby (the always welcome James Le Gros, disconcertingly convincing as an ignoramus in need of anger-management lessons), who is trying to force her to leave the job, as well as dealing with the stress of an impending separation and raising money for a troubled former employee – at the same time keeping up her own appearance and that of Double Whammies. Fortunately, she has by her side morale-boosting co-workers, including the impossibly bubbly and sweet Maci (Haley Lu Richardson) and the charismatically sardonic Danyelle (Shayna McHayle). The supporting cast is superb, helping to maintain the film's sweet-and-sour balancing act, but it's Hall who elevates everything with one of the most memorable lead performances in recent years. She emphasises the film's complexities with conflicted expressions of generosity and exhaustion that say far more than words.

While things periodically take us out of Whammies' world, much of the goings-on are confined to the bar. Bujalski effortlessly stages these scenes in lively fashion, with characters going in out of frame and action moving dynamically throughout the space, conveying a palpable sense of the motions of a service job and how the workplace functions.

Turning the tables: Haley Lu Richardson, Regina Hall

The film brings the bar to life as something malleable that shifts depending on the time of day and the clientele therein, culminating in a broadcast fight-night gone wrong – a would-be climactic companion to Tati's famous restaurant breakdown sequence in *Playtime* (1967), in which the rebellious subversion is ultimately futile. Whenever things do take us elsewhere, it has a point. A drive with Cubby and Lisa moves from a heated argument to the disgruntled boss pursuing a vehicle in a bout of road rage, taking them on a detour that traces Double Whammies to the class-contrastive setting of suburbia.

A great amount of attention is paid to the tender interactions between Lisa and the other employees, but things never become overly sentimental. Ultimately, Lisa, by virtue of her managerial position, is at once exploited by her employer and perpetuates that very system's exploitation and objectification of the women working beneath her. However, she approaches transcendence with her intelligence, grace and the upholding of her principles. Early in the film, she declares: "Today could go from good to great." It's the sort of mantra one clings to in order to keep going, even as the powers that be mock any notions of social mobility or self-actualisation.

The screwball nonchalance of the film might suggest a trajectory towards a happy ending, but things arrive at a profound gesture of frustration in a stunning final scene that recalls, of all films, Pasolini's *Theorem* (1968). It is here that Bujalski peels the layers away to reveal his intricate critique of the oppressive systemic mechanics that perpetuate sexism, racism and poverty and create illusions of progress. The beginnings of catharsis are cut short, and a bigger picture is implied by the surrounding highways which connect this pocket of US life to the rest of the country.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Houston King, Sam Slater
Written by Andrew Bujalski
Director of Photography Matthias Grunsky
Edited by Karen Skloss
Production Designer Jake Kuykendale
Sound Mixer Erik Duemig
Costume Designer Colin Wilkes

©Support The Girls, LLC
Production Companies Myriad Pictures, Burn Later Productions, Houston King Productions, Slater Films
Executive Producers Jonathan E. Fryd, Scott Carmel, Paul Bernon, David Bernon, Susan Kirr

Cast
Regina Hall Lisa
Haley Lu Richardson Maci
James Le Gros Cubby
Shayna McHayle Danyelle
Dylan Gelula Jennelle
AJ Michalka Krista
Brooklyn Decker Kara
Jana Kramer Shaina
John Elvis Jay
Lea DeLaria Bobo
Steve Zapata Arturo

In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor Bulldog Film Distribution

Texas, present day. Lisa is the manager of Double Whammies, a sports bar staffed by skimpily dressed waitresses. She arrives at work barely holding together her emotions, and spends the day coping with problems both at her workplace and in her personal life. She has to train new employees, discovers a botched robbery by a kitchen staffer's cousin, puts on a car-wash fundraiser to collect much-needed money for a former employee, and has to deal with her boss Cubby's aggressive treatment. After a heated exchange with Cubby, Lisa meets up with her partner to look at an apartment for rent, which we discover is only for him.

Later, Lisa finds out that the former employee she raised money for is dating a man who behaved inappropriately at Whammies. She takes back the money and instead gives it to Arturo, the staffer connected to the robbery. Returning to the bar ahead of a fight-night broadcast, she decides to quit. She leaves the bar in the hands of the other girls, who let things slip into chaos.

Sometime later, Lisa is being interviewed for a job at a more corporate sports bar, where she encounters former Whammies girls Maci and Danyelle, who have been fired for the fight-night mayhem. The three gather on a rooftop to have a drink and commiserate.

Vita & Virginia

United Kingdom/Ireland 2018
Director: Chanya Button
Certificate 12A 109m 46s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

That the writers, painters, publishers and partner-swappers of the so-called Bloomsbury group have been overexposed and excessively praised is a frequent complaint. When the film *The Hours* was released in 2003, Philip Hensher wrote a piece in the *Telegraph* headlined "Virginia Woolf makes me want to vomit." When the BBC screened the drama *Life in Squares* in 2015, the *Guardian* scolded, "Why do we still kneel at the shrine of the Bloomsbury set?" Woolf and her contemporaries provoke at least as much irritation as admiration: they were too wealthy, their politics insufficiently political, their sexualities not easy to acronymise. Although it's not hard to see the appeal of a script about two charismatic women to a film industry reckoning with unequal representation, another biographical portrait of the famously rich, white and snobbish Woolf – in this case focusing on her affair with the novelist and socialite Vita Sackville-West – feels like a hostage to fortune, or at least to Twitter.

Based on a 1992 stage play by Eileen Atkins (who also adapted Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* for Marleen Gorris's 1997 film), Chanya Button's sophomore feature does offer an initial impression of being dutifully seduced by the surface pleasures and sillinesses of the Bloomsbury world. As Vita, Gemma Arterton is a dashingly gorgeous 1920s fashion plate whose extramarital intrigues are listed for laughs; her mother Lady Sackville (Isabella Rossellini) rattles out disapproving boilerplate about the perils of fraternising with socialists and bohemians; interiors and outfits look relentlessly ravishing and a little bit fake. Matters take a turn for the rather more intriguing, however, when Vita's alpha-female sexual competitiveness and greed for experience drive her towards the famous, beautiful, married and mentally fragile Virginia Woolf (Elizabeth Debicki).

Gemma Arterton

Both Romola Garai and Eva Green were announced for the role of Virginia during this film's long journey to the screen. While there is of course no knowing what they might have done with it, Debicki makes you fervently grateful that the opportunity finally wended her way. She is just extraordinary here, emphasising Woolf's otherworldly strangeness – the cut-glass accent, the pretentious verbal flourishes, the rough mix of patrician confidence and childlike vulnerability – without sacrificing a shred of the character's humanity. If the temptation is often to modernise historical figures to make them more relatable, Debicki simply draws us into a world in which a wholly unmodernised Virginia Woolf feels viscerally real. Everything about the way she embodies this version of Virginia is piercingly effective, from the low pitch of her voice to the gawky elegance with which she occupies those droopy deco dresses.

Just as Debicki's performance, in its rawness and grandeur, shrugs off the cutesier conventions of literary biopic, so Atkins and Button (who co-wrote the script) avoid pat trajectories in the depiction of the two women's relationship. Rather than society denying them happiness, it is the women's own personalities that complicate their brief affair: Vita is ardent in pursuit but bored by conquest; Virginia is hard to pin down but dangerously vulnerable once seduced; neither, we surmise, really wants from the other what she thinks she does. A final effort to come together as a couple becomes instead, in the beautifully played closing scene, the birth of a truly honest friendship. Here the film reveals itself to be not so much a tale of sex or romance as a strikingly compassionate examination of *character*: how radically different one person can be from another; how cruelly we can mislead and misunderstand each other as a result; and, touchingly, how loving bonds and good advice can emerge between us anyway.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Evangelo Kioussis
Katie Holly
Screenplay
Eileen Atkins
Chanya Button
Based on a play by Eileen Atkins
Director of Photography
Carlos de Carvalho
Edited by
Mark Trend
Production Designer
Noam Piper
Music
Isobel Waller-Bridge
Sound Recordist
Simon Willis
Costume Designer
Lorna Marie Mugan

©Orlando Productions Limited/ Blinder Films Limited
Production Companies
Piccadilly Pictures in association with SQN Capital
Protagonist Pictures in association with Lipsync Productions and Sampsonic Media
With the participation of Bord Scannán na Héireann/The Irish Film Board
A Mirror Productions/ Blinder Films production
A film by Chanya Button
Executive Producers
Simon Baxter
Gemma Arterton
Celine Haddad
Kieron J. Walsh
Dave Bishop
Mika Kioussis
Christopher Figg
Robert Whitehouse
Nicolas D. Sampson
Arno Hazebroek
Norman Merry
Peter Hampden

Cast

Gemma Arterton
Vita Sackville-West
Elizabeth Debicki
Virginia Woolf
Rupert Penry-Jones
Harold Nicolson
Peter Ferdinando
Leonard Woolf
Gethin Anthony
Clive Bell
Emerald Fennell
Vanessa Bell
Adam Gillen
Duncan Grant
Karla Crome
Dorothy Wellesley
Rory Fleck Byrne
Geoffrey Scott
Nathan Stewart-Jarrett
Ralph Partridge
Isabella Rossellini
Lady Sackville

In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
Thunderbird Releasing Ltd

London, the 1920s. Scandal-prone socialite Vita Sackville-West sets her romantic sights on the novelist Virginia Woolf, who along with her husband Leonard is part of the famously bohemian Bloomsbury set. Vita's mother threatens to cut her off if she creates any further controversy. Though he has extramarital interests of his own, Vita's diplomat husband becomes annoyed when her infatuation gets in the way of her wifely duties. Virginia, initially resistant, is eventually seduced, but finds the passion destabilising. Vita loses interest when Virginia refuses to leave Leonard for her. However, their liaison succeeds in providing Virginia with literary inspiration: she writes her novel 'Orlando' in tribute to Vita's fluid sexuality and uncompromising spirit. Vita's mother is horrified. Vita and Virginia make a last effort to run away together, but find themselves talking instead of making love, with Virginia exhorting Vita to embrace her flightiness and promiscuity, and to accept dwelling alone, like the character of Orlando, rather than striving vainly for relationships that won't satisfy her.

'Orlando' is a huge hit. Vita and Virginia remain close friends until the latter's death.

We the Animals

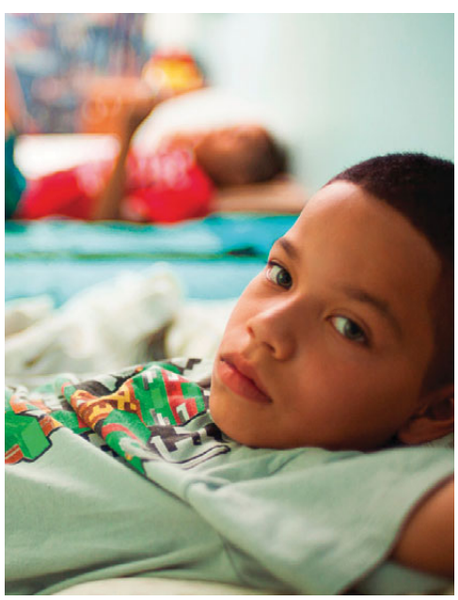
USA 2018
Director: Jeremiah Zagar
Certificate 15 93m 34s

Reviewed by Tim Hayes

Films about childhood can be as burdened by familiar narratives as any other genre, but *We the Animals*, a debut feature by documentarian Jeremiah Zagar, is defined by form more than by content. Shot mostly in delicate grainy handheld 16mm and edited so that the two poles of adolescence – exuberance and hesitance – bleed into each other constantly, the film sends all the visual signals of being a recalled memory. Tiny hints on screen do indeed point to a 1990s setting, but the overall effect is unmoored from any specific origin, as much a feeling and an aura as a story.

Three young brothers, Jonah (Evan Rosado), Manny (Isaiah Kristian) and Joel (Josiah Gabriel) – all non-professional actors, effortlessly charming – are followed doing what pre-teens are always doing: trying to fathom the unknowably dense lives of their parents, Paps (Raúl Castillo) and Ma (Sheila Vand), as well as the weightlessness of their own. In the middle of one of the boys' many playful ruckuses, Joel briefly grabs the camera itself, nudging it in his direction as if the boys were in control of the world. But Jonah's life might not be so weightless. At nine, he is the youngest, and closer to Ma's subdued sensitivity than to Paps's Latino temper, recording his feelings in a journal that no one else knows about. A non-swimmer, he dreams of being underwater, hemmed in, until one day he spontaneously imagines levitating into the air instead, as if surfacing from the lake of his dreams and just not stopping. And while his brothers slowly become more like their macho father, Jonah starts to feel something for handsome blond teenage neighbour Dustin (Giovanni Pacciarelli), whose taste in porn covers both straight and gay.

Jonah's emerging sexuality is central to the story because it's central to him, but Zagar's humane film deals with it in inferences and fragments rather than exposition, in much the same way that it deals with everything else. Jonah's growing sense that he should kiss Dustin mirrors an earlier attempt to kiss Ma, which inadvertently caused her agony,



Taking wing: Evan Rosado

since Paps had recently punched her in the face. It's ambiguous whether Jonah will fare better the second time around. Ma, played with stoic grace by Vand ('The Girl' in 2014's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*) clings to her youngest boy as a lifeline in her volatile marriage, although that might make her as helplessly restrictive in her own way as Paps. She gathers up the kids and leaves her abusive husband, but has to admit there is nowhere else for them to go.

While the source novel by Justin Torres follows its unnamed young narrator to a destination elsewhere, the film christens him Jonah for added aquatic resonance and remains inside his domestic territory. But Zagar does arrange an actual passage of time, by shooting the film's final scenes after a five-month hiatus, his three actors still children but visibly more mature than they were moments ago. It's a visual marker for the way that some things have changed and some things have not, no less magic-realist in its fashion than Zagar's other routes to a dreamy impressionistic affect. Tethered to reality, but not too tightly, the film shows childhood as being all mood, all muddle, all thoughts of drowning or flying or something in between.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Christina D. King
Jeremy Yaches
Andrew Goldman
Paul Mezey
Screenplay
Dan Kitrosser
Jeremiah Zagar
Based on the novel by Justin Torres
Director of Photography
Zak Mulligan
Edited by
Keiko Deguchi
Editors
Brian A. Kates
Jeremiah Zagar
Production Designer
Katie Hickman
Music
Nick Zammuto
Production Sound Mixer
David 'Lion' Thompson
Costume Designer
Valentine Freeman

©Us Three LLC
Production Companies
In association with Cinereach
A Public Record and Cinereach production
A film by Jeremiah Zagar
Supported by SFFilm/Rainin Filmmaking Grant
Executive Producers
Philipp Engelhorn
Michael Raisler
Film Extracts
Marjoe (1972)

Cast
Evan Rosado
Jonah
Josiah Gabriel
Joel
Isaiah Kristian
Manny
Sheila Vand
Ma
Raúl Castillo
Paps
Giovanni Pacciarelli
Dustin

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Eureka Entertainment

Upstate New York, the 1990s. Jonah, Manny and Joel are young mixed-race brothers, living with parents Ma and Paps. Jonah, the youngest, secretly keeps a journal, recording his feelings and his parents' volatile marriage. While swimming in a lake, Paps submerges non-swimmers Jonah and Ma; Jonah subsequently has dreams of water and being immersed. Paps beats Ma, tells the brothers that her injuries are from dental treatment, and abandons the family. Jonah bonds with Dustin, a teenage neighbour. Paps returns, and takes the brothers with him to his night security job, but is fired as a result. A depressed Paps digs an open grave in the garden; Jonah lies in it and dreams of rising into the air. Ma takes all three brothers and leaves Paps, but having nowhere to go, they return home. Later, Jonah feels isolated from Manny and Joel, who are becoming more like their father. He tentatively kisses Dustin. The family discovers Jonah's journals, causing a fight. Jonah remembers how he and his brothers used to be, and imagines flying over the countryside.

Yesterday

USA/United Kingdom/People's Republic of China/Japan 2019
Director: Danny Boyle

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The premise, of course, is ludicrous. For no reason that we're ever told (though a briefly glimpsed news headline speculates about solar flares), every light all over the world goes out for 12 seconds. What worldwide deaths, disasters or catastrophes this might have caused isn't considered; all that matters for the purposes of *Yesterday* is that in the brief blackout an unsuccessful singer-songwriter from Lowestoft called Jack Malik is hit by a bus. When he emerges from hospital he discovers that he's the only person in the world who's ever heard of The Beatles. (In fact, we subsequently learn that two others, a Russian man and a Scouse woman, still remember them, but this has minimal effect on the plot.) Armed with this knowledge, he starts performing Beatles numbers as though they were his own, and rapidly gains worldwide fame.

OK, it's ridiculous. And it hardly helps that the set-up bears striking similarities to Laurent Tuel's *Jean-Philippe*, in which a music nut gets knocked out and wakes up in a world where no-one has heard of Johnny Hallyday. Or is this pure coincidence? Still, fuelled by the fluent screenwriting skills of Richard Curtis and the directorial smarts of Danny Boyle, the film coasts along entertainingly enough, much aided by the engaging lead performances of Himesh Patel, making his big-screen debut as Jack, and Lily James as Ellie, his part-time manager and not-quite-girlfriend.

Curtis tosses in some passable jokes. Early on there's a diverting exchange between Jack and the rebarbative manager of the hardware store where he works. Then, desperately searching for the vanished pop group on Google, Jack types in 'John Paul George and Ringo' and up comes 'Pope John Paul II'. When he performs 'Hey Jude', Ed Sheeran (playing himself and gamely sending up his own scruffy, boy-next-door image) insists it would be better titled 'Hey Dude'. Jack's suggestion that his album be called 'The White Album' is turned down for lacking diversity.

The fab tour: Himesh Patel

All amusing enough. But if you set up a dramatic premise – however far-fetched – you need to resolve it. And it's here that the film falls apart, fatally unzipped by Curtis's besetting penchant for sweetly gloopy endings. To avoid spoilers, let's just say that what we get is that weary old romcom cliché, the reconciled couple kissing in a public place while all around them beam and applaud – only with the onlookers here multiplied by a factor of several thousand. And in the benevolent glow of this romantic conjunction, all the conflicts set up by the plot can be blithely swept aside as though they'd never existed.

Still, Boyle deserves credit for rejecting the easy solution of CGI and instead persuading a 6,000-strong crowd of extras, all unpaid, to assemble on the beach at Gorleston in Norfolk and cheer their happy heads off. And, of course, we get to hear some not-at-all-bad music.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Tim Bevan
Eric Fellner
Matthew James Wilkinson
Bernard Bellew
Richard Curtis
Danny Boyle
Screenplay
Richard Curtis
Story
Jack Barth
Richard Curtis
Director of Photography
Christopher Ross
Editor
Jon Harris
Production Designer
Patrick Rolfe
Score by/Score Produced by/Keys
Daniel Pemberton
Production Sound Mixer
Simon Hayes
Costume Designer
Liza Bracey

©Universal Studios
Production Companies
Universal Pictures presents in association with Perfect World Pictures a Working Title production
A Danny Boyle film
Presented in association with Dentsu Inc.
Executive Producers
Nick Angel
Lee Brazier
Liza Chasin

Cast
Himesh Patel
Jack Malik
Lily James
Ellie Appleton
Ed Sheeran
himself
Kate McKinnon
Debra Hammer
Sophia Di Martino
Carol
Ellise Chappell
Lucy
Meera Syal
Sheila Malik
Harry Michell
Nick
Vincent Franklin
Brian
Joel Fry
Rocky
Alexander Arnold
Gavin

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

Present-day Suffolk. Jack Malik is an aspiring singer-songwriter whose career is going nowhere; his part-time manager, Ellie, tells him not to give up. One night, Jack is cycling home after a gig when all the lights in the world go out for 12 seconds, and he's hit by a bus. When he's out of hospital, Ellie and his friends Nick and Carole give him a new guitar to replace the one smashed in the collision; to thank them, he sings the Lennon-McCartney song 'Yesterday'. To his amazement, they've never heard it, and have no idea who The Beatles were. Checking online, Jack finds that the group has been wiped from human memory. He starts performing their songs to huge acclaim, and is recorded by a young man, Gavin, who has a local studio. This attracts the attention of Ed Sheeran, who invites Jack to be his warm-up act on a tour to Moscow. It's a triumph for Jack.

Hailed as the greatest songwriter of the age, Jack regretfully says goodbye to Ellie and travels to Los Angeles, where hard-driving manager Debra takes over his career and plans his first album. As Jack's reputation balloons, his sense of guilt at stealing credit for the songs increases. With his roadie Rocky, he heads to Liverpool to scout out Beatles territory. Ellie joins him there and they realise they should have become lovers, but she is now seeing Gavin. Jack gives a huge open-air concert at Gorleston on the Norfolk coast, and another at Wembley, where he publicly confesses that the songs aren't his and declares his love for Ellie. The audience applaud wildly as the pair make their escape. A few years later, they're back in Suffolk, married with children, and Jack is performing Beatles numbers for local schools.

BFI Film Forever

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE
Sight&Sound

INSTITUTIONAL DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Multi-user access to a digital archive of Sight & Sound and Monthly Film Bulletin

- A new, comprehensive research tool
- Available exclusively to institutions, universities and schools
- Explore the magazine's historic 500+ issues
- Delivered on the Exact Editions platform

For more information visit
bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/institutional-subscriptions

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE
Sight&Sound

CONNECT WITH SIGHT & SOUND ONLINE

/SightSoundmag
@SightSoundmag
/sightsoundmagazine
bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

Home cinema

Here comes John Braine again: Simone Signoret and Laurence Harvey in *Room at the Top*

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Sixty years on, Jack Clayton's melodrama of social ambition and sexual conflict still feels gripping and raw

ROOM AT THE TOP

Jack Clayton; UK 1959; BFI; Region B Blu-ray & Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 12; 117 minutes; 1.66:1. Extras: short drama *The Visit* (Jack Gold, 1959); archive film of the West Riding; trailer; commentaries by Neil Sinyard and Josephine Botting; image gallery;

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

There's a story about Hermione Baddeley, in a restaurant in the early 70s, deciding to plump for the halibut: "It can't be too awful, can it? After you've lived with Laurence Harvey, nothing in life is ever really too awful again." Baddeley had her reasons: she and Harvey had lived together for a year or so in the early 1950s; he was fresh out of drama school and she was a successful veteran of cabaret and film. He spent her money, beat her up, and eventually left her for Margaret Leighton.

Likeability was not Laurence Harvey's strong suit, in life or on screen: he was perfect casting for Sgt Raymond Shaw in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), the war hero who looks the part but who almost everybody hates, himself included. But, but, but: then there's *Room at the Top*, a film in which he displays all those qualities – vulnerability, humour, generosity – that otherwise seem alien to him. The film got him an Oscar nomination for best actor and made him an international star.

The film is taken from a novel by John Braine, a bestseller of 1957. It begins with Joe Lampton (Harvey) arriving in the thriving northern industrial town of Warnley – Halifax and Bradford provided the locations in Jack Clayton's film – to start work as a clerk in the town hall. Joe is smart, ambitious and good-looking – check out all the ladies behind their desks, checking him out – but he's an orphan from a dirt-poor town ("I'm not surprised you wanted to leave Dufton as soon as possible," his new boss tells him), whose only education has been in a POW camp. (Though the film's atmosphere of class rage and its sexual frankness make it feel like a prophecy of the 60s, Joe's age and the fact that he served in the war make it clear that it is looking back to the late 40s.) Within minutes of his arrival, he is staring wolfishly out of the office window at a pretty young thing climbing into a sports car – "That's not for you, lad," a colleague warns him. The pretty young thing is Susan Brown (Heather Sears), daughter of the factory owner who practically runs the town – the yen for posh birds being one of the English literature's great themes, from *Tom Jones* onward, and especially for the Angry Young Men, a label that was supposed to cover Braine. Intent on getting to know Susan,

Signoret has a tragic warmth that makes you want to share her belief in Joe: she does half Harvey's job for him

Joe joins the local amateur dramatic society. Romance flutters into life; but her parents and self-assured, officer-class boyfriend make him feel his social inferiority. At the amdram, too, Joe is befriended by Alice Aisgill (Simone Signoret), a French woman unhappily married to a local businessman, older, more sophisticated and intelligent than Joe is. They begin an affair; and he has to make a choice between the passion he experiences with Alice and all the advantages of the sweet-natured but insipid Susan.

The film was a huge hit – the third most popular film at the British box office in 1959; the top two spots were held by *Carry on Nurse* and *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, the biopic about the missionary Gladys Aylward: the quaint bawdiness of the one and the piety of the other give you a pretty good picture of the society Joe and Alice were up against. *Room* stood out for its portrayal of sex – not only the frankness with which Joe and Alice's afternoon liaisons are portrayed, the easy acknowledgement of sexual pleasure, but also the way it takes for granted that feelings are more complicated than cinema's usual model of romance allows: that we can love more than one person, or be more than one person. Joe wants it all; he's selfish, touchy, self-pitying – he never stops feeling his disadvantages. But he's also shy, loving and funny; it's at least possible that he wants Susan's prettiness and simplicity as much as he wants her father's money and access to society. Harvey is very good at suggesting the conflicts, making his stiffness seem like a carapace for a softer nature; even his wavering northern vowels, irritating from a technical point of view, contribute to the sense of someone who doesn't know who he is, who is trying out parts.

If the pain of his choices feels raw, that's largely down to Signoret. Alice isn't French in the book, but the change is smart: foreignness removes her from the class conflicts, makes her as much of an outsider as Joe. And what British actress of the time could have been so unforced, so naturally sensual, so at ease with desire? Signoret is superb, imbued with a tragic gentleness and warmth that make you want to share her belief in Joe: she does half Harvey's job for him. She won the Best Actress Oscar, the first French-born woman since Claudette Colbert 25 years earlier, for *It Happened One Night* – another film about the yen for posh birds. Hermione Baddeley turns up too, as Alice's friend who lends the lovers her flat, and who tries to awaken Joe's conscience: she peers at him with huge eyes and tells him to do right by her friend. What must have been going through Baddeley's head? But her two minutes or so on screen got her a supporting actress nomination.

This fine new BFI release comes with two commentaries – I listened to Jo Botting's, excellent on the background – and a selection of archive film of West Yorkshire, including a splendid short experimental film of Halifax from the late 60s, with flash cuts and visual rhymes between the industrial buildings and the memorials in the cemetery. There's also a gallery of audience response cards, filled out at screenings: "most adult film this country has ever had," says one. I'm not sure that isn't still true.

New releases

BELLMAN AND TRUE

Richard Loncraine; UK 1987; Powerhouse Indicator; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 114/122 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: two versions of film – London Film Festival premiere (122 minutes) and UK theatrical cut (114 minutes); interviews with Loncraine, actor Kieran O'Brien, writer Desmond Lowden, composer Colin Towns; trailer; image gallery.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

This wilfully quirky heist thriller gets off to a reasonably cracking start, with Bernard Hill and young Kieran O'Brien as, apparently, father and son on the run in London from mysterious heavies. Once they are caught, the situation begins to take shape, but the action loses momentum. The man is, it emerges, a computer expert regretting having taken a bribe to figure out a bank security system: now he has to finish the job. The boy is his ex's son, not his, dumped on him when she walked. In the interview with this release, O'Brien recalls with pleasure the friendship he developed with Hill, and their scenes do feel relaxed and warm, the surrogate father struggling to give the boy a sense of security as they flounder among the wreckage of marriage and job, the sharks circling. Other relationships work less well: Frances Tomelty is underserved by a tart-with-a-heart romantic subplot apparently there purely to set up a twist.

The film has a scrappy, undersized feel that makes sense when you know that it began as a TV series (George Harrison's Handmade took over after Euston Films, Thames TV's film production arm, dropped out). But the heist has a *Rififi*-ish ingenuity, if not the same suspense – it contains what may be the ur-version of the bit where intruders hack into CCTV to fool guards with a loop of an empty room. A rough-edged getaway sequence is filmed with pleasing/alarming indifference to health and safety; and locations in London and at Dungeness are used well.

Disc: A good package, with anecdote-rich interviews, makes for a pleasant evening's watching, without convincing me that the film has deserved better from posterity than it's had.

Bernard Hill, Kieran O'Brien in *Bellman and True*

EVERYBODY IN OUR FAMILY

Radu Jude; Romania 2012; Second Run; region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 107min; 1.85:1. Extras: interview with Radu Jude; short films *The Tube with the Hat* (2006) and *Alexandra* (2007); trailer; booklet with essay by Carmen Gray.

Reviewed by Geoff Andrew

Those familiar only with the more recent explorations of Romanian history initiated by Jude with *Aferim!* (2015) might be surprised by his earlier shorts and features, most of which deal in Romanian-realist mode with the tensions of family life, in particular the exploitation of children in various ways by parents, even as they protest profound concern and love for the offspring in question. Jude's second full-length feature is a marvellous example of the writer-director's insightful intelligence and deft craftsmanship. While its predecessor, *The Happiest Girl in the World* (2009), had announced a filmmaker with a sharp sense of humour and a skilful way with actors, *Everybody in Our Family* (2012) displays both a sure sense of storytelling and an ability to elicit multiple levels of meaning from a simple narrative conceit.

The starting point is a divorced thirtysomething arriving at his old apartment to take his five-year-old daughter out for the weekend as agreed with his ex, only to be informed by her mother and her current partner that the child is unwell and must stay at home. This is the cue for a curt stand-off which gradually becomes more volatile, until things suddenly get out of control and violence erupts. Jude handles the mood shifts expertly, balancing dramatic suspense and absurdist black comedy while ensuring every development rings true. This alone is no mean achievement, but what distinguishes the film is Jude's acute understanding of the dynamics of family life; of masculine pride, prejudice and insecurity; and of how children can be deployed as pawns in the complex, often cruel power-games of adults. Moreover, one is left keenly aware, through allusion, props and milieu and so on, of how this family's predicament and behaviour may be symptomatic of a particular society at a particular moment in time. In short, the film is not so different after all from *Aferim!* (2015) and Jude's later, more subtly stylised films.

Disc: A director-approved HD transfer ensures the vibrancy of Andrei Butica's cinematography is retained. Jude is pleasingly articulate in interview, and of the impressive two shorts, *Alexandra* comes across as a fine dry run for the main feature.

A FACE IN THE CROWD

Elia Kazan; US 1957; Criterion; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 126 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: interviews with Ron Briley on Elia Kazan, Evan Dalton Smith on Andy Griffith; *Facing the Past* (2005) – documentary on the film.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

A Face in the Crowd is one of the films that got dragged into the conversation when Donald Trump started to look likely to win

New releases

the presidency, and it's not hard to see why. Lonesome Rhodes is an Arkansas good ol' boy plucked from the drunk tank at the local jail to sing and spin yarns on a radio show; his plain speaking and homespun wisdom rocket him to local stardom, then national celebrity; before long he's starting to look like a political power-broker. It's a satire on America's willingness to be entertained and its preference for dishonest simplicity over honest complexity; or, if you're feeling more cynical, it's plain reportage.

The film has never lost pertinence, but at times has had an extra sting – in the aw-shucks showbiz era of Ronald Reagan, or when Arkansas good ol' boy Bill Clinton took over. The application to Trumpism is underlined by a certain resemblance between Trump and the film's star, Andy Griffith – blond, shambling, tousled, a tad soft around the edges. Griffith was a successful comedian, and Lonesome's charm and rousing bluesy singing are all his; but Kazan helped him to find black depths – using methods, or Method, that in Evan Dalton Smith's account weren't always humane. This was Griffith's only excursion into the dark: he moved on to *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-68), a sitcom dedicated to smalltown wholesomeness and to his own unambiguous likeability. Patricia Neal earns equal billing as the Ivy League radio producer who discovers him, demonstrating that even the educated bourgeoisie can be suckers for a country boy; Lee Remick glows as the baton-twirling other woman; Walter Matthau glowers as Neal's more sceptical colleague.

Disc: Criterion offers a sharp print and a concise but useful package of extras. In particular, Kazan biographer Ron Briley provides a helpful guide to Lonesome's models, from folk philosopher Will Rogers to the demagogic politician Huey Long.

THE HEIRESS

William Wyler; US 1949; Criterion; Region B Blu-ray; 115 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: conversation between screenwriter Jay Cocks and Farran Smith Nehme; costume historian Larry McQueen on the film's costumes; short film *The Costume Designer* (1950) featuring Edith Head; Olivia de Havilland on *The Paul Ryan Show* (1986); excerpts from tribute to Wyler on *The Merv Griffin Show* (1973); interview with Ralph Richardson from *Directed by William Wyler* (1986); trailer.

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

One of Henry James's most plainspoken and piercing works, his slender *Washington Square* (1880) provides the framework for William Wyler's wonder of Paramount period-piece sheen. The film revolves around the domestic torments experienced by Catherine Sloper, a tenderhearted but largely ignored bachelorette living with her father in the Manhattan of the 1870s.

The glamour required of studio era Hollywood and its contract stars made it hard to adapt 19th-century 'realist' writers with fidelity; Olivia de Havilland, modelling Edith Head finery fit for the Astor ballroom, can no more embody the shy, commonplace Catherine described by James than could Jennifer Jones the mediocre Emma Bovary of Flaubert for Vincente Minnelli the same year. But de Havilland provides a performance to make us disbelieve our eyes, her Sloper a variation on her most famous role, Scarlett O'Hara's sister-in-law Melanie Hamilton in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), that places the wallflower character centre stage. (While excelling at playing a shrinking, stammering, sweet thing, de Havilland was a decisive career woman, originating the project after seeing Ruth and Augustus Goetz's stage adaptation of James's book on Broadway.)

Washington Square survives beautification, since Catherine's charm is less the issue than is her guardian's conviction of her lack of it – Ralph Richardson, as her father, is a high-handed snob more than equal to the task of snuffing any spark of self-esteem. More mysterious in motives is Montgomery Clift, as dashing and slippery suitor Morris Townsend. Too performatively sincere in his declarations to be believed, Clift's Townsend stands in stark contrast to the reserved emotional lucidity of de Havilland's Catherine – the clash of performance styles here is used to every bit as great an effect as that between Clift and John Wayne in *Red River* (1948). Wyler, fully capable of *coups de cinéma*, understands that the whole of the story is in the telling little tremors that cross de Havilland's face with absolute articulation – fleeting flinches of anguish and expectation that gradually draw one into a total emotional synchronicity with the character while following her into premature middle-age, and that awesome moment when resignation to heartbreak becomes a kind of liberated exaltation.

Disc: Ample offerings to attract those interested in costumer Head and other personnel, while a film of rich ambiguity receives a transfer of absolute visual clarity.

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

Arnold Fanck; Germany 1926; Eureka/Masters of Cinema; Region B Blu-ray; 105 minutes; Certificate U; 1.33:1. Extras: score by Aljoscha Zimmerman; audio commentary by Travis Crawford; documentary *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* (1993); booklet.

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The Holy Mountain (*Der heilige Berg*) was the second in the cycle of *Bergfilme* (mountain films) directed by mountaineering obsessive Arnold Fanck. (The first was *Der Berg des Schicksals – The Mountain of Fate*, 1924.) What it lacks in dramatic complexity – the plot is simple to the point of inanity – it makes up for in visual majesty. But as Kat Ellinger says in a booklet essay for this release, it's hard to watch without recalling subsequent events, for this film marks the screen acting debut of Leni Riefenstahl, soon to become the greatest cinematic propagandist of the Third Reich with *Triumph of the Will* (1935) and *Olympiad* (1938).

She plays dancer Diotima (Riefenstahl had started out as a professional dancer) who becomes the love-object of two mountaineers in the Swiss Alps: Karl (Luis Trenker) and the much younger Vigo (Ernst Petersen). When the two discover their rivalry – rather inconveniently, midway through an ascent of the most perilous mountain in the district – it leads to tragedy.

Riefenstahl, inspired by *Der Berg des Schicksals*, approached Fanck and begged to be in his next film; equally inspired by her, he is said to have written it in three days. While the quality of her acting – and indeed of her dancing – can't be called outstanding, her screen presence is undeniable. In the intensity of her gaze there's something that recalls Brigitte Helm as the robot Maria in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). Or, again, is this reading into her performance the shadow of future events?

There's no denying, though, the overwhelming beauty of the Alpine landscapes captured by Fanck's camera – all shot, as an intro title emphasises, on location. The ski-race scenes, viewed from high perspectives, have a geometric fascination all their own.

Disc: The outstanding extras are Ellinger's booklet essay on Riefenstahl (new to this release), Doug Cumming's essay on Fanck (reprinted from the earlier Eureka release) and an impressive three-hour documentary by Ray Müller on Riefenstahl's career.

John Lennon in *How I Won the War*

HOW I WON THE WAR

Richard Lester; UK 1967; BFI Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual-format edition; Certificate 12; 111 minutes; 1.66:1. Features: commentary by Neil Sinyard; archive audio of Lester on stage with Steven Soderbergh at the BFI; animated shorts, Lester trailers; booklet notes by Sinyard.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Right film, wrong time. After two Beatles films and *The Knack... and How to Get It* (1965), American expat Richard Lester was the reigning grandmaster of Swinging London frivolity, and no one was expecting this fierce World War II satire, which plays out like a metaphorical howl against the unfolding carnage of Vietnam. John Lennon's presence as the alternately obsequious and bolshy Private Gripweed only complicated matters, for although his cheeky public persona filtered effectively into the part, audiences were wrongly anticipating that he'd break into song. Instead, what we have here is a British cousin of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, a multi-layered, artful construction with a patina of comedy, whose underlying substance is seething anger at the glorification of war.

With celebrations for the 20th anniversary of VE Day fresh in the memory, Lester set about dismantling the self-congratulatory propaganda so prevalent in British cinematic depictions of the conflict; but his film's combination of formal audaciousness and tonal astringency proved too testing for popular acceptance. Michael Crawford, often cast as a lovable milquetoast, is terrifying as the inexperienced officer whose demented devotion to king and country proves a dangerous liability during a symbolically absurd mission to lay a cricket pitch behind enemy lines as a welcome for

OUT OF TIME

A spiffy new edition of a classic *noir* thriller offers a reminder of a director whose career deserves a lot more attention than it's had so far

THE BIG CLOCK

John Farrow; US 1947; Arrow Academy; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 97 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: audio commentary by Adrian Martin; video discussions of the film by Adrian Wootton and of Charles Laughton by Simon Callow; 1948 radio dramatisation; theatrical trailer; image gallery; booklet with writing by Christina Newland.

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Although he wrote quite a few books himself – from novels to a history of the early medieval papacy – there's still no credible study of the work of John Farrow (1904–63), husband of Maureen O'Sullivan and father of Mia. Born in Sydney to Anglo parents, he wormed his way into screenwriting work in Hollywood in 1927 after an adventurous period in the merchant marine, much of it in the Pacific, and a chance encounter with the documentarist Robert J. Flaherty. He was briefly in Europe in the early 1930s, writing a script for Basil Dean in England and working on the English version of Pabst's *Don Quichotte* (1933). His first work as a director was the 1934 short *The Spectacle Maker* (made to show off the three-strip Technicolor process) for MGM, but he signed with Warner Brothers in 1936 and began making B movies for the studio the following year. In a 1946 interview he asserted, "The only way to get anywhere in Hollywood is to make money pictures. Then you can get some measure of respect and authority from the studio bosses, and little by little you get to do more of the things you want to do." What he really wanted to do is up for discussion, but there are at least a dozen titles in his long filmography which make him a priority for further research.

The early B movies are hobbled by production-line scripts, but consistently show sparks of inspiration in their staging and compositions, such as in the firing-squad scenes in his debut, *Men in Exile* (1937). The second, *She Loved a Fireman* (1937), is notable for its breakneck pacing and integration of documentary inserts, and the Boris Karloff vehicle *West of Shanghai* (1937) follows Sternberg's *Shanghai Express* in refusing to reduce Chinese culture to racist stereotyping. At RKO, *Five Came Back* (1939, a plane-crash-survivors-in-the-jungle movie with script contributions from Dalton Trumbo and Nathanael West) was vivid and tense enough to get him noticed, and he graduated to A movies the following year with *A Bill of Divorcement* (1940). Many good things followed, often at Paramount, including *Wake Island* (1942), *Two Years Before the Mast* (1946), *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948), *Alias Nick Beal* (1949) and *His Kind of Woman* (1951). That's a far from exhaustive list.

The Big Clock (copyrighted 1947, released in 1948) is widely accepted as one of Farrow's best, partly because of its cast (Charles Laughton, Ray Milland, Elsa Lanchester), partly because of its classy literary pedigree: pulpy novel by the poet Kenneth Fearing, script by crime novelist Jonathan Latimer, the latter a frequent writer for Farrow. It's actually one of those rare films which is greater than the sum of its parts: it offers a fresh spin on the *noir* mood of the times, improves on the novel's plot, cunningly gets around the Production Code and, through its expressive and ingenious *mise en scène*, design and lighting, manages to suggest the larger themes that Fearing touches on, from the 'political' dangers of corporate capitalism to the dystopian fantasy of a world ruled by the clock.

Race against time: Rita Johnson and Ray Milland in *The Big Clock*

The film follows the book in centring on the chasm between an ogre and a 'common man': monstrous publishing magnate Earl Janoth (Laughton, with an urbane line in fascistic ruthlessness) and his star crime-reporter employee George Stroud (Milland, largely on autopilot). The plot structure is unusual: Janoth kills his ex-mistress Pauline in a fit of rage about half an hour in, and Stroud realises that he's been set up as the prime suspect a full half an hour later. The brilliant twist is that Stroud is the only one who knows that he's the wanted man; the final third has him scrambling to avoid being seen by anyone who can identify him, while racing to expose the truth. The plot's slow-burn allows space for unexpected sidetracks into screwball comedy (Elsa Lanchester's deliciously oddball painter, Lloyd Corrigan's Broadway lush) and the working-through of a subplot about Stroud's long-delayed honeymoon. Fearing's book has the murder happen when Janoth and Pauline accuse each other of having same-sex lovers; Farrow smuggles this idea into the film by giving Janoth's hatchet-man Bill (Henry Morgan) some weird private ecstasy as he massages his boss.

'The Big Clock' is one of those rare films greater than the sum of its parts, offering a fresh spin on the noir mood of the times

It's light-touch filmmaking: no point is laboured, and the dialogue is often scintillating. Farrow uses long takes when appropriate, sometimes with the camera moving from room to room, sometimes exploring depth in a fixed frame. The shot from inside the elevator as it stops at different floors in Janoth's office tower is a minor classic. Few other 1947 productions are as comprehensively entertaining as this. The Arrow disc is an unimprovable transfer but sadly none of the contributors to the extras brings any wider perspective on Farrow's career to the party. Still, the Farrow rediscovery starts here!

Television by Robert Hanks

ORSON WELLES GREAT MYSTERIES, VOLUME ONE

UK 1973-74; Network; Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 317 minutes; 1.33:1.

Before settling down with this anthology series, it's worth going to YouTube and watching a brief video labelled 'Orson Welles receiving an Honorary Oscar®': it shows the moment at the Academy Awards in 1971 when John Huston made a speech in Welles's praise, in which he noted that in the film business the word 'genius' was often taken to mean 'difficult' and 'unemployable'; the absent Welles, off filming in Europe (or that was his excuse), contributed a filmed acceptance speech, graciously and eloquently expressing his humble gratitude and the hope that he might in future still make films worthy of the honour.

That didn't happen. Though he completed *F for Fake* (1973) and his documentary on the making of *Othello* (1978), and carried on trying to make *The Other Side of the Wind*, he was now embarked on the chat-show and sherry-commercial phase of his career, taking jobs for the cash, with a cheerful indifference to his dignity that it's hard for a fan to share; the culmination of this phase, just before his death in 1985, was his role as the voice of Unicron in *Transformers: the Movie* (1986). This is the context for *Orson Welles Great Mysteries* (how I wish they'd put a possessive apostrophe in there): Welles was now reaping the rewards/paying the price of genius, depending on how you interpret it. The Oscars® video is worth watching, too, for Welles's own performance: the eyes that dart to and fro, as though he's searching for words; the raised eyebrow and wry smile that seem to acknowledge the inadequacy of the ones he's found; the lifting of his gaze to the middle distance, as though toward some happier past or future; a quick grin that seems to invite the audience to join in his appreciation of a joke that he hasn't actually cracked. You can see all the tricks repeated, with variations, in his introductions and epilogues for the 13 dramas on these two discs.

That's not to say that his performance is dull or trite: just that you are conscious of watching 'Orson Welles', the persona rather than the person. His involvement in Anglia's anthology series, a precursor to its *Tales of the Unexpected* (1979-88), presumably didn't extend further than filming his spiels (with Gary Graver, the cameraman who was his collaborator on his most personal projects in the last 15 years of his life) – I imagine Anglia was more interested in the Welles brand as a way of marketing the series internationally than in his creative input. Each episode begins (after a dourly groovy John Barry theme tune) with Welles in close-up, wearing a wide-brimmed black hat and a cloak, chomping on a large cigar (sometimes chomping hard enough to obscure the words). He is lit from below, rather in the way you put a torch under your chin to tell a spooky story. The background is a different colour for each story – for 'Compliments of the Season' there's a silhouette of a Christmas tree behind his shoulder, lights and baubles winking. At the end, he looks pensive or amused, wondering what awaited the protagonists next, or drawing out some moral or irony. He surely wrote his own scripts, or at any rate rewrote someone else's: the air of worldliness – harking back to the London or Paris of the 1930s – the mock-philosophical edge and the verbosity are very Wellesian. Some have an against-the-clock 'Will this do?' quality, but others have a playfully satirical edge or a gravitas that the films themselves don't often earn: genius can't always suppress itself.

The Leather Funnel It's jazzed up into a messy witch story, but a mess that gives you Christopher Lee, Simon Ward, Jane Seymour, and fabulous satanic library music

The single season of *Great Mysteries* had 26 episodes: 13 of them – rather randomly selected and ordered – are included here; they've never been released before, which perhaps makes the so-so quality of sound (the failure to provide subtitles is sometimes frustrating) and mostly videotaped picture less of a problem. Most are by 'classic' authors, mostly set in period, though one or two are given a contemporary spin: Balzac, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Conan Doyle, W.W. Jacobs (twice) and O. Henry (also twice); a couple are by vintage but obscure authors, the rest by little-known moderns. A talented set of directors was put to work on them, including Peter Sasdy, who had made Nigel Kneale's *The Stone Tape* the year before, Alan Gibson (*The Satanic Rites of Dracula*, 1973) and Philip Saville, who would go on to make *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982). A number of the adaptations were written by David Ambrose, who later devised the hoax apocalypse *Alternative 3* (1977). And the casts are remarkable: the odd American star – Eli Wallach and José Ferrer, both employed to play drunk down-and-outs, Jack Cassidy – an army of dependable British actors (Donald Pleasence, Dinsdale Landen, Harry Andrews, Kenneth Haigh), and some younger actors the audience wouldn't have known, like Phil Davies and Michael Gambon.

Most of the stories are too brief to build suspense, the twists too obvious or simply too dull to have much effect, the filming perfunctory (Collins's 'A Terribly Strange Bed' screams in vain for an expressionist, hallucinatory treatment). But an update of W.W. Jacobs's be-careful-what-you-wish-for yarn 'The Monkey's Paw' is almost worth the price of admission by itself: Cyril Cusack, Patrick Magee, Megs Jenkins and a very young Michael Kitchen. 'La Grande Bretèche', after Balzac, plays well on the contrast between Peter Cushing's bony menace and Susannah York's youthful glow. 'The Leather Funnel', a supernatural squib by Conan Doyle, is jazzed up into a messy contemporary witch story, but a mess that gives you Christopher Lee, Simon Ward, pre-Bond Jane Seymour, and fabulous satanic library music by Pierre Arvay. Ian Holm gives 'Trial for Murder', a Dickens ghost story, a measure of terrified conviction. But still, what haunts you most afterward is the ghost of talent brought low, of genius reduced to grubbing for pennies. S

New releases

Montgomery's advancing troops. Add to that sundry Brechtian alienation devices and an array of colour-coded battlefront flashbacks, blending real and fake newsreel, and you see a relentless determination to unsettle the viewer, even as Charles Wood's knowing dialogue offers biting wit. Arguably, the stylistic bustle slightly distracts from the raw anger that drives everything, yet the sheer artistic gumption remains jaw-dropping. A hugely welcome revival for a movie that's never had its proper due.
Disc: David Watkins's cinematography looks well in this MGM transfer, backed up by Neil Sinyard's authoritative commentary. The highlight, though, is the audio archive of a hugely entertaining event at London's National Film Theatre, as Lester shares career-spanning war stories with a duly impressed Steven Soderbergh.

THE LANDLORD

Hal Ashby; US 1970; Kino Lorber; Region A Blu-ray; 110 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: interviews with stars Beau Bridges and Lee Grant and with producer Norman Jewison; theatrical trailer.

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

How did a movie like *The Landlord* ever happen? It couldn't have been easy in 1970, and it feels impossible now – not without pandering, without decomplicating the material until it isn't the same material anymore, hurrying everyone along to almost inevitable empathy and understanding. But *The Landlord*, given a coruscating adaptation from Kristin Hunter's 1966 novel by Bill Gunn, wants to complicate, not reconcile. Elgar Enders (Beau Bridges), the hippyish 29-year-old fugitive from an old-money family, buys a townhouse in a black neighbourhood with intent to renovate: his brittle Wasp mother Joyce (Lee Grant) refers to his project as a 'plantation'; but when he recoils, it's not an easy generation-gap gag. The fact is that she has a point.

The line is followed by a hard cut to a fantasy pastoral scene of Joyce on the lawn of the family manse, singing a minstrel lullaby. Such brio-filled edits abound in *The Landlord* – Hal Ashby is on his first film as a director here, but had established himself as one of the boldest and most desired cutters in the business, off the back of *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) and *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), both for *Landlord* producer Norman Jewison. While Hunter and Gunn give *The Landlord* its soul, Ashby lends it breadth of vision and mobility; Elgar is its ostensible lead, but the movie is as much interested in the lives on the periphery of his, shuttling between the white world of the Enders family and the black Brooklyn into which Elgar has inserted himself. Culture clash is the comic currency of the movie, which revolves around unexpected encounters, some of these leading to moments of what might be called bonding or even love. Joyce gets pissed on carbonated wine ("Drink your wine before the ice cubes melt") with Elgar's upstairs neighbour, Marge, played by Pearl Bailey; Elgar falls in love with a light-skinned girl who lives around the way, Lanie (Marki Bey). The laughter is real, as is the attraction – but none of this erases the vast social, historical and economic divide across which these people are addressing one another. Whatever else may go on, these white folks own the game – to grow up white, in a memorable line by Diana Sands, is to grow up "casual" – while these black folks have to bend the rules to stay in it.

Anne Bancroft, Aldo Ray in *Nightfall*

The crumbling house stays, *droit de seigneur* remains in a world built on the plantation, and Elgar is not redeemed – as a teacher tenant explains to the overgrown blonde adolescent before a classroom of "Black is beautiful"-reciting children: "Some people can't learn what we learn." To those used to a diet of fatuous brother-and-sisterhood, this may seem bleak. On the contrary, I should think it one of the more valuable pieces of knowledge that anyone and everyone can acquire.
Disc: A serviceable transfer and interviews of at least anecdotal interest, including almost half-hour audiences with Bridges and Grant.

THE LAST WARNING

Paul Leni; US 1928; Flicker Alley; region-free Blu-ray & DVD dual format; 78 minutes; 1.20:1. Extras: visual essay by film historian John Soister; image gallery; booklet essays by Soister and composer Arthur Barrow.

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

This irrepressible Universal horror-comedy was Paul Leni's final film – he died of sepsis eight months after its release. The former art director, who excelled at the excesses of German expressionist drama, had accepted a Hollywood job offer from Carl Laemmle just two years before. In America he made four silents, including this Broadway boo-fest, the haunted-house film *The Cat and the Canary* (1927), similar in tone to this, and *The Man Who Laughs* (1928), the influential melodrama starring Conrad Veidt's rictus grin.

The Last Warning was intended as a vehicle for Universal star Laura La Plante, a versatile comic actress, these days is criminally undersung. Based on a story by Wadsworth Camp, 'The House of Fear', it revolves around an unsolved murder at a Broadway theatre. Years after the mysterious death has closed the house, a new producer arrives determined to revive both play and theatre: unexplained bumps in the night deepen the mystery and keep the reassembled troupe on their toes. The action is frequently ludicrous, but in the most lovable way.

La Plante plays the company's leading lady; her co-stars include a scene-stealing Montagu Love and John Boles. Leni's restless, tricksy camera (Hal Mohr was the inventive DP) and a supporting cast of rubber-faced comedians (Mack Swain, Carrie Daumery) combine to provide both gags and jump-scares in abundance. It's a hoot, with a carnivalesque atmosphere, and outlandish production design by Charles D. Hall.
Disc: Flicker Alley presents the new 4k restoration on both Blu-ray and DVD. The invigorating new score was composed by Arthur Barrow.

NIGHTFALL

Jacques Tourneur; US 1957; Arrow Academy; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 79 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: commentary by critic Bryan Reesman; video appreciation of *Nightfall* by Philip Kemp; video essay by Kat Ellinger; theatrical trailer.

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Made in the twilight of the classic *film noir*, *Nightfall* begins in the gloaming, in the half-light that Jacques Tourneur made his speciality. The scene is something like the decanted essence of loneliness: Aldo Ray, blunt instrument physique and a voice that's a soft tread over gravel, picks through the out-of-town papers on a downtown newsstand, flinches suddenly when he's hit by the lights going on, neon beckoning like invitations to a bright, gay party to which this poor, fugitive soul hasn't been invited.

The story – adapted from a 1947 novel by the great Philadelphian crime writer David Goodis (*The Burglar*) – involves a wrongful accusation of murder and a heap of cash that's gone missing somewhere in the wilds of Wyoming. The dialogue, by the estimable Stirling Silliphant, has a bitter savour right from the mellow and world-wise first encounter between Ray and Anne Bancroft, discovered skint at a barroom, maybe or maybe not on the make. Especially choice is the criminal double-act played by Brian Keith and Rudy Bond: Keith blunt, businesslike, and on the verge of fed-up, Bond a jocular, needling psychopath, the pair belonging to a memorable tradition of odd-couple killers that stretches on through Don Siegel's *The Lineup* (1958) and the Coens' *Fargo* (1996).

All this and the attendant genre prerequisites are handled with casual grace. But as fine as the film's talk is, it is at its most eloquent in scenes that require none: that opening; a fashion show held before a crowd in broad daylight that becomes imbued suddenly with imminent, leering menace; an interlude on a Greyhound bus headed west in which Ray and Bancroft sleep as a neighbour fiddles with a transistor radio. It's a pulpy story about dirty money and grim gunsels, but filming it Tourneur summons up moments exemplifying those evanescent half-tone qualities in which he excels, moments incommunicable without cinema. A newsstand; a Greyhound bus – being alone in the dying light; rising together in a rising day.
Disc: A passel of video testimonials from adherents to the film's deserved cult, including the always capable Kat Ellinger.

NO ORCHIDS FOR MISS BLANDISH

St John L. Clowes; UK 1948; Indicator/Powerhouse; region-free Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 104 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: alternative presentation with US rerelease title sequence; interview with US distributor Richard Gordon, actor Richard Neilson; discussion of the film's censorship history; docudrama *Soldier, Sailor* (1945); trailers; booklet.

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

This, according to the usually unflappable *Monthly Film Bulletin*, is "the most sickening exhibition of brutality, perversion,

New releases

sex and sadism ever to be shown on a cinema screen". Don't get too excited, though; by today's standards *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* is pretty tame stuff, as witness its present emergence on Blu-ray as a PG.

James Hadley Chase's novel, published in 1939, had already come in for a critical hammering. Gorge Orwell, in his 1941 essay 'Raffles and Miss Blandish', called it "a header into the cesspool", though conceding it was "a brilliant piece of writing". Chase, an Englishman, intended *Miss Blandish* as a pastiche of the James M. Cain school of hard-boiled crime fiction – and the movie takes the same route. Though shot at Twickenham, it's set in a *noir*ish USA, with a largely British cast making shaky attempts at American accents.

The plot's simple enough. Heiress Miss Blandish (Linden Travers) is kidnapped by a gang for her diamonds and ransom money; the first amateurish bunch of hoods is totalled by the more powerful Grisson gang, and Miss B falls for its leader, Slim Grisson (Jack La Rue, the sole genuine Yank in the cast).

Slackly paced and indifferently shot (the director, St John Clowes, hadn't directed a film for 14 years, and it shows), *Miss Blandish* is chiefly notable for having aroused a hysterical critical shitstorm, much of it directed at the British Board of Film Classification for having released the film with minimal cuts and an 'A' certificate. (The 'X' didn't yet exist.) In the *Sunday Times* Dilys Powell addressed an open letter to the censor, suggesting a new category: 'D' for disgusting.

The film was remade, rather better, by Robert Aldrich as *The Grissom* [sic] *Gang* (1971).

Disc: A 50-minute docudrama, *Soldier, Sailor*, from a treatment by Clowes, is a so-so wartime propaganda piece. Best of the extras: ex-BBFC examiner Richard Falcon's measured account of how the censorship board mishandled the row over *Miss Blandish*, and its long-term fallout; and a wide-ranging booklet.

ONE, TWO, THREE

Billy Wilder; US 1961; Eureka/Masters of Cinema; Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD (separate releases); Certificate U; 108 minutes; 2.35:1. Extras: interview with Neil Sinyard; audio commentary by Michael Schlesinger; booklet.

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Under the credits, the headlong stampede of Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance* (Soviet music, very apt) kicks off Billy Wilder's scattershot satire on the Cold War, set in just pre-Wall Berlin and intended as "the fastest picture in the world". It showcases what was almost James Cagney's farewell performance; exhausted from delivering the machine-gun dialogue, he retired from the screen for 20 years, returning only for his brief, sedentary scene in Milos Forman's *Ragtime* (1981).

He plays C.R. MacNamara, head of Coca-Cola in Berlin; entrusted with the care of ditzy teenager Scarlett (Pamela Tiffin), daughter of Coke's Atlanta CEO, he's horrified to find she's shacking up with a militant East German prole, Otto (Horst Buchholz) – and even more so when it turns out she's pregnant. With the head honcho and wife flying over to visit, Mac decides his only course is to transform the surly Otto into a model capitalist – in the space of a few hours.

Inevitably, plausibility goes out of the window, but the high-speed gags hit some targets, with Americans and Russians, capitalism and communism, all mocked – though the sharpest barbs are reserved for the Germans, caricatured as heel-clicking automata. (The film was banned in Germany, though it's now something of a cult item.) And almost everybody, left or right, crumbles in the face of a sufficiently lavish bribe.

Wilder tosses in some sly movie references: at one point Mac threatens Otto with a half-grapefruit, as Cagney notoriously did to Mae Clarke in *Public Enemy* (1931), and when he learns of Scarlett's pregnancy he responds with Edward G. Robinson's dying line from *Little Caesar* (1931): "Mother of mercy, is this the end of Rico?" None of this helped the film's fortunes. The Wall went up while it was still shooting, and heightened East-West tensions soured its critical reception. For all its impressive energy, *One, Two, Three* remains one of Wilder's less-appreciated offerings.

Disc: Neil Sinyard provides a detailed and affectionate intro, and there's some well-informed background writing in the booklet.

Theresa Russell in *Track 29*

TRACK 29

Nicolas Roeg; UK 1988; Powerhouse Indicator; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 90 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: NFT interview with Roeg (1994, audio only); commentary by filmmaker/historian Jim Hemphill; interviews with actor Colleen Camp, editor Tony Lawson, costume designer Shuna Harwood, sound mixer David Stephenson; isolated music & effects track; trailer, image gallery.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

The starting-point is Dennis Potter's 1974 Play for Today *Schmoedipus* (from the old Jewish joke: 'Oedipus, Schmoedipus, so long as he loves his mother'). A woman caught in a dull marriage, to a husband who sublimates passion into playing with his train set, is visited by a mysterious young man who turns out to be the son she had at 16. They strike up a relationship queasily combining the infantile and the sexual; but what is really going on – whether anything is in fact going on – is unclear. *Track 29* (from the lyrics of 'Chattanooga Choo Choo') translates the action from suburban England to North Carolina, replacing a cardigan-clad Anna Cropper with Theresa Russell, younger and more sexualised in sickly pastel leotard and leggings.

The marriage of Potter and director Nicolas Roeg makes sense, given their shared interest in morbid psychology, but it doesn't work: character is crowded out by kinks, image-making swamped by a cluttered, nursery aesthetic (Russell surrounds herself with dolls and spends her days watching children's cartoons, including, oddly, *Dangermouse*). Russell doesn't here invite sympathy or belief (her variable southern accent is unhelpful). As the son, Gary Oldman, a hot property after *Sid and Nancy* (1986), is if anything too in-your-face creepy: you ought to feel at least a little of his seductive power. Christopher Lloyd as the husband and Sandra Bernhard as his bit on the side are underemployed.

Disc: It's hard to imagine a release that would make a stronger case for the film, given the quality of sound and picture and Jim Hemphill's commentary, excellent on the Hitchcockian and Lynchian overtones.

UNDER FIRE

Roger Spottiswoode; US 1983; Eureka/Masters of Cinema Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 128 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: commentaries by Spottiswoode and music producer Bruce Botnick; Joanna Cassidy interview; booklet.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Only four years after the Sandinistas' armed campaign caused Nicaragua's corrupt leader Somoza to flee the country, Hollywood's quality-conscious Orion Pictures had this impressive fact-inspired drama on screen. It was an era when grown-up studio pictures like Costa-Gavras's *Missing* and Peter Weir's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (both 1982) brought intelligence, dramatic heft, even a touch of romance to stories set in far-off trouble spots about which the US audience presumably could care less. This breakthrough feature for former Peckinpah editor Spottiswoode got strong critical notices then disappeared without trace; it makes for an impeccable Blu-ray revival, especially given that it features one of Jerry Goldsmith's most highly regarded scores – a pioneering Hispanic-tinged blend of electronic and acoustic elements, featuring Pat Metheny on lead guitar.

The modern term 'fake news' proves apposite: Nick Nolte's hard-bitten war photographer drops his neutrality for a partisan gesture with explosive ramifications, possibly because he's falling for reporter Joanna Cassidy. Spottiswoode's sharp direction often adopts his character's POV, drawing attention to photography's ability to draw us into the carnage while keeping us at a safe distance, prompting questions about the hows and whys of media images. Ron Shelton's script delivers on the bullet-strafed bonhomie of professionals at work, and captures shifting, complex adult emotions with thumbnail grace. There's also the sheer pleasure of pre-CGI cinema: the production had the resources to mock-up several blocks in Oaxaca, Mexico, creating an immersive reconstruction of conflict-ravaged Managua, with borrowed military hardware adding impact. The film's tacit approval for the Sandinistas comes from a brief moment before Reagan and the reactionary 80s moved US public attitudes in the opposite direction. It's a singular cinematic treasure.

Disc: A glowing transfer shows the artistry of regular Kubrick cameraman John Alcott at its best, while Nick Redman does a sterling job of moderating both commentaries – with Spottiswoode focusing on the production, and music producer Bruce Botnick on composer Jerry Goldsmith's working methods. A super package.

Lost and found

PIROSMANI

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Giorgi Shengelaia's biopic is a stunning portrait of an isolated, unhappy man who is yet attuned to the world's beauty

By Erica Eisen

I have come to believe that the most underrated national cinema is the cinema of Georgia. Sergei Parajanov, a native of Tbilisi though an Armenian by blood, has at least received recognition within arthouse circles, and Otar Ioseliani has also gained international traction, having won the Andrei Tarkovsky Award, the Silver Bear and multiple Fipresci prizes, among other accolades. Yet their countrymen have largely (and undeservedly) escaped the notice of many foreign filmgoers. Such is the case for Giorgi Shengelaia, whose 1969 work *Pirosmani* left me in stunned silence the first time I saw it.

Shengelaia's film is based on the life of the artist Niko Pirosmani, who was born to a peasant family in rural Georgia and raised by his two elder sisters after the death of both his parents. Poor all his life, Pirosmani found work whitewashing houses, lettering signs and doing oilcloth paintings for the cafés of Tbilisi, in which capacity he would soon become something of a local character. Pirosmani's face is now on Georgia's one-lari note, but during his lifetime he never found success with the artistic establishment, for whom his 'naive' style was laughable and clownish; he died at 55, most likely of malnutrition.

Shengelaia's mother, Nato Vachnadze, was a film actress, a star of early Soviet cinema, and his father Nikoloz and brother Eldar were both prominent directors in their own right. He was born in Moscow in 1937, and attended the State Institute of Cinematography, where his graduating project was a documentary on Pirosmani that was praised by the artist Kirill Zdanevich as "outstanding" and "ingenious". That early project would later bloom into Shengelaia's second feature, which ran in international festivals in the 70s and was received with appreciation by *Film Quarterly* and the *New York Times*. Vincent Canby's review for the latter concludes, "I can only wonder why the film... has taken so long to reach this country." The number of those familiar with the film today remains small, the ardent fans dwarfed by the much larger contingent of those unfamiliar with it.

Shengelaia is not the only director to have translated the lonely painter's story for the screen. Parajanov's short *Arabesques on the Pirosmani Theme* (1985) is often billed as a documentary but is more of an evocation, part cinematic catalogue of the painter's works, part ode to his spirit. The frames quiver in time with the music as the camera takes in details of the painter's work: the white unmodelled faces, the dark, expressive eyes, the pot-bellied wineskins in the foreground of every feast scene.

Georgia on my mind: Avto Varazi as the artist Niko Pirosmani in Giorgi Shengelaia's film

Avto Varazi's physiognomy and dress combine to make Pirosmani appear at almost all times uncomfortable in his skin

I suspect that both Shengelaia and Parajanov were drawn to Pirosmani by his style's absolute lack of pretension, its quality of open-hearted honesty, and by the way he stuck to this style, even in the face of ridicule, until the end.

Shengelaia's Pirosmani (played by the painter Avto Varazi) is a man of few words; his speech, when it occurs, is characterised by a touching sincerity that marks him as a man for whom the manifold beauties of life remain vivid and unblunted by familiarity. In an early scene Pirosmani is working at a dairy, ladling milk into a funnel as his eyes are drawn to the line of donkeys framed by the open door. He rushes out, leaving his business partner to clean up the spilt milk – all because, as he explains, the grass the animals are carrying reminds him of his home village. This unguardedness sets him apart from the well-groomed elites who eventually spurn him. At his only exhibition, which is disastrous, Pirosmani speaks excitedly about building a big wooden house at the centre of town where regular people can talk about art. There is no response.

Shengelaia never allows his film to get tangled in melodrama. Of Pirosmani's disappointed love for a French dancer known as Margarita, we see only his expression as he watches her perform, neglecting the meal that has been laid out for him. Much of the weight of the film's characterisation is carried by Varazi's physiognomy and dress, which combine to make Pirosmani appear at almost all times uncomfortable in his skin ("like a dried fish", as one character puts it). His arms droop melancholically at his sides; the steep angle of his moustache gives the appearance of a permanent frown. He wears dark clothes that fit loosely on his thin, beetle-like limbs, and high-collared shirts that resemble priestly vestments. His eyes stare out from deep sockets. The wide brim of his hat, which he wears both outside and in, casts his face in everlasting shadow.

Shengelaia's camera is patient, sometimes tiptoeing this way or that way but more often, content to drink in the richness of colours and textures afforded by each scene. Through long shots, Shengelaia conveys Pirosmani's fundamental isolation from the world around him: on the day of his arranged marriage, the painter sits staring ahead despite the jovial music and dancing behind him. Many of his paintings are of lone figures: a thick-bearded janitor with a harried expression, a grey-blue giraffe, its dewy eyes looking out in bewilderment. The critical failure of his paintings served only to isolate him further, but the attunement to glimmers of beauty that they express so eloquently was what sustained him. "I don't want to die now", Pirosmani says at one point. "I want to live under this sun."

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

'Deliberately foregoes scenes of emotional fireworks and clashes of character... [but] has a cumulative emotional force... fastidiously stylised... persuasively explores the relationship between the artist, his creations and his particular society. It recreates a dream-like, non-verbal, almost unconscious level of activity'

Verina Glaessner *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1974

Books

Going Dutch: Robert De Niro in Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* (1983), identified by Hoberman as one of the first US films to critique 1980s culture

MAKE MY DAY

Movie Culture in the Age of Reagan

J. Hoberman, The New Press, 400pp,
ISBN 9781595580061

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Joining J. Hoberman's two previous history volumes, *Make My Day* is the capstone of a trilogy – he has suggested the title *Found Illusions* – as vaulting in ambition as anything undertaken beneath the banner of film studies, and the defining work of his career to date. It follows *The Dream Life: Movies, Media, and the Mythology of the Sixties* (2003), which marks the end of the counterculture Orgy with the emergence of cover star Harry Callahan in *Dirty Harry* (1971), and *An Army of Phantoms: American Movies and the Making of the Cold War* (2011), and obeys the same structural pattern followed in both: a retelling of events which occurred in the American social and political sphere, cross-indexed with events from the world of American popular culture, particularly if not exclusively its cinema. As in the previous volumes, a large part of Hoberman's purpose is to illustrate and elucidate the degree to which these spheres are in fact one and the same thing, the Venn diagram becoming a single circle under the reign of the first movie star elected to the presidency, Ronald Wilson Reagan.

As American public life becomes cinematic spectacle, everything becomes cinema. In his 2018 'top ten' list for *Artforum*, Hoberman placed the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination hearings just below Spike Lee's *BlacKkKlansman*, and in *Make My Day* he clips the rave reviews for Lieutenant Colonel Ollie North's live televised testimony before the joint House and Senate select committee hearings into the Iran-Contra scandal, including Hollywood casting director Mike Fenton quoted exclaiming: "The guy's a star!"

Hoberman's yarn picks up some time before the Reagan Revolution, starting in 1975, the year of Robert Altman's *Nashville*, Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*, and the Fall of Saigon, as a public beset by a looming sense of national catastrophe pays out boffo b.o. for bigger and better imaginations of disaster. For Hoberman, the genius of both Reagan and of movie-brat impresarios like Spielberg and George Lucas, whose box-office dominance coincided with the rising of Reagan's political star, was found in their ability to offer a counter-narrative to the national bummer of the 1970s. *Make My Day* – the title is to be read with an emphasis on the 'Make' and the manufacturing of 'Morning in America' reality – tracks the journey from Lucas's *Star Wars* spectaculars to Reagan's proposed Star Wars defence programme, after the president had given that old bit of intellectual property the Cold War what would later come to be called a successful 'reboot'. As Lucas is identified as tapping into a collective longing for perceived simpler times with the prelapsarian fantasy of his youth in Modesto, California, with *American Graffiti* (1973), so Reagan succeeds in stirring up nostalgia for an age that never existed, the imagined somnolescent national consensus of the Eisenhower era.

Its march-of-history forward momentum invested with relentless energy thanks to Hoberman's spry transitions, the seemingly effortless horizontal cuts that switch back and forth between politics and pop, *Make My Day* is about as enjoyable a work of critical theory-steeped analysis as you are likely to find – so engaging and nimble that the full measure of the political despair behind it only sinks in after the fact. While drawing on simpatico thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, whose revelation that "cinema and TV are America's reality!" is very close to the thesis of Hoberman's trilogy, Hoberman has also left no archive untouched, replaying over a decade of American history from news magazines, Gallup polls and, of course, movie reviews. Alongside contemporary notices, Hoberman reprints several pieces of his own on Reagan-as-actor/politician as published in the pages of the *Village Voice*, where he was a regular contributor for 30 years, most of them as a lead critic. During this stretch Hoberman was a rarity among working critics on the mainstream beat, still dutifully following Rudolf Arnheim's long-ago call for 'The Film Critic of Tomorrow' who could undertake "the consideration of film as an economic product, and as an expression of political and moral viewpoints".

If the book can be approached as a study of any single auteur, that auteur is Reagan, managing a franchise known as 'America'

ALAMY (1)

The potential downside of a critic dedicating themselves to such considerations – as opposed to, say, the close-reading of an actual text and contemplation of its authors as autonomous agents struggling to follow their own inclinations rather than zombies under the sway of the mystical zeitgeist – is that it's a process nearly as unscientific as reading entrails, or as the clairvoyant movie theatre sociology of Pauline Kael, much cited in *Make My Day*. Hoberman, however, makes few omnipotent claims to cause and effect, leaving instead a series of open-ended queries along his trail as he proceeds to lay collected facts before the reader, digressing all the way along in analyses of individual films that show his cinephiliac enthusiasm and erudition. Canadian McLuhanist Arthur Kroker and French philosopher Jacques Ellul are used, respectively, to unpack David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* (both 1983), identified as "the first Eighties critiques of Eighties culture"; David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) is juxtaposed rather ingeniously with *Kings Row* (1942), a film containing one of the president's own favourite performances; and elsewhere Hoberman's serious misgivings about Clint Eastwood the political actor must vie against his obvious fascination with Clint Eastwood the filmmaker. (The judgements on Spielberg, whose 1985 *The Color Purple* goes unmentioned, are both more damning and less individual – the reducing-the-spectator-to-a-guileless-child accusation levelled by many a wounded New Left veteran.)

In as much as *Make My Day* can be approached as a study of any single auteur, however, the auteur in question is Reagan himself, a director/star managing an ongoing franchise known as *America*. Hoberman's account measures Reagan against his celluloid and televisual advisors, matching events in the history of the administration to the record of the president and Mrs Reagan's private screening schedule, as when tracking the shockwaves registered by 1983 ABC anti-nuke telefilm *The Day After* in an increasingly hawkish White House, or Reagan's possibly piqued interest in the fantastic battlefield technology in Eastwood's *Firefox* (1982).

Make My Day, with its predecessors, analyses the 20th-century transformation of the office of the presidency to the role of 'entertainer-in-chief', a state of affairs that hardly begins and ends with the conservative movement – *The Dream Life* made much of the hagiography of John Kennedy in docudrama *PT 109* (1963), as *Make My Day* does of presidential hopeful Senator John Glenn's appearance, played by Ed Harris, in Philip Kaufman's *The Right Stuff* (1983). All of this concludes, as necessarily and lamentably it must, with the political rise of the current president, whom Hoberman correctly identifies as, in spite of his advanced years, a largely post-cinematic creature, his natural habitat social media and reality television. Cinema in its 20th-century form may be passing, but the American spectacular continues to play on 300 million tiny screens. The title of the Dead Kennedys' 1981 anti-Reagan anthem may here be applicable: 'We've Got a Bigger Problem Now'.

BING CROSBY

Swinging on a Star
The War Years: 1940-1946

By Gary Giddins, Little, Brown and Company, 736pp, ISBN 9780316887922

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

Gary Giddins's magisterial *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams – The Early Years 1903-1940* was published in 2001, and it raised the standard for any critical biography of an entertainer. Packed with insightful descriptions of practically every single Crosby recorded as a young man, Giddins's book made the case for Crosby as the most innovative pop singer of his time. It detailed how he brought jazz phrasing and rhythms into popular music, using dynamics to put a song across and aiming to make it sound like he was crooning intimately into your ear. Giddins struck an ideal balance between lavishing attention on Crosby's singing and his very popular films of the 1930s, and wondering about the enigma of the man himself.

Crosby's widow Kathryn was so impressed by Giddins's work that she opened her home and archive to him for a second book, one of the reasons it has taken 17 years to complete. Giddins is such a Crosby enthusiast that seemingly no information about him is too trivial to disregard. *Bing Crosby: Swinging on a Star* covers only six years in Crosby's life, but it is the same length as the first book, working out to roughly 100 pages for each year. Even Crosby's biggest fans might find this level of detail daunting, but there is a serenely obsessive quality to Giddins's writing that draws you in even when you really don't care to read any more about, say, Crosby's contract negotiations for his radio show, which take up many pages.

Giddins shows how Crosby's laid-back cool helped to make him probably the most popular man in America in the 1940s

Bergman and Crosby in *The Bells of St. Mary's*

By 1940, Crosby had been married to his wife Dixie Lee for ten years. Lee was a singer who largely gave up work after she married Crosby, and she had four sons with him. Crosby had been a heavy drinker in his youth, and Lee had tried to match him, but he was able to stop drinking and she couldn't. Giddins's first scenes in this book describe the nightmare awaiting Crosby whenever he came home. Lee would drink and cause scenes, frightening their children, and Crosby's work rate accelerated partly to give him an excuse to stay away. Giddins quotes a letter from Crosby in which he states that Lee had said some unforgivable things while she was drunk and that he couldn't love her any more.

Professionally, Crosby was becoming an institution in the 1940s, a member of the family in living rooms across America through his radio show, and a beacon for the clergy as Father O'Malley in two films for Leo McCarey: *Going My Way* (1944), which won Crosby an Oscar for best actor, and *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945), opposite Ingrid Bergman. His 1930s movies had been highly successful, but Giddins shows how his laid-back cool approached its zenith on screen in the 1940s and how his films helped to make him probably the most popular man in America, universally commended for his modesty. The mid-section of Giddins's book becomes a definitive 'making of' account of the filming of his two hit McCarey movies, and anyone who admires the director's work might be shocked by the extent of his drinking as described here.

Giddins chronicles Crosby's mounting personal dilemmas as Lee becomes more and more unreliable. Their house burned down when a Christmas tree caught fire in 1942, and they lost everything. Though this wasn't Lee's fault, rumours spread about it, and a fire was used as a dramatic device in *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (1946), a thinly veiled account of the problems in Crosby's marriage. Crosby finally fell for a young actress named Joan Caulfield, and sought a divorce from Lee, but as a Catholic and symbol of the priesthood on screen, Crosby was strongly advised against it and decided not to follow through with it.

Giddins's book ends with a near-exhaustive day-by-day account of a trip Crosby made to Manhattan with Caulfield, during which he was trailed by two young female fans, one of whom kept a diary that Giddins quotes from. (*The Bells of St. Mary's* was an enormous success at this time.) This is the Karl Ove Knausgaard approach to biography, in which every cup of coffee Crosby drank is seen to be of interest, but Giddins will still have you searching out Crosby singles like 'Dolores' and 'It's Been a Long Long Time' with his world-class music criticism – and his appraisal of Crosby as actor and movie star is similarly insightful. Giddins also makes a strong impression with the very detailed section dealing with Crosby's work entertaining troops near the front lines during World War II. As valuable as all this is, however, it is to be hoped that Giddins will return to the pace of his first book, with one final volume on Crosby to go with these two definitive works.

PINK-SLIPPED

What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?

By Jane M. Gaines, University of Illinois Press, 328pp, ISBN 9780252083433

NOBODY'S GIRL FRIDAY

The Women Who Ran Hollywood

By J.E. Smyth, Oxford University Press, 328pp, ISBN 9780190840822

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Over recent years, several books and DVD box-sets have been devoted to exploring and sharing evidence to back up film historian Shelley Stamp's statement that "women were more engaged in movie culture at the height of the silent era than they have been at any other time since". However, with the narrative now well established that positions of creative control were open to women in the silent period but then subsequently not, two books have come along to complicate that story. The first is by film scholar Jane M. Gaines, who via the Women Film Pioneers Project website has been one of the leading figures in the charge to reinstate female filmmakers in their place in history. The second is by historian J.E. Smyth, whose book fulfils a similar function to that site, although she takes issue with the use of the word 'pioneer' itself. Both in their own way seek to revise existing film histories and even challenge feminist scholarship. While Gaines's focus is on the end of the silent era and the mysterious exit of women from the industry, Smyth takes up the baton in the 1930s, and profiles the impressive number of women wielding behind-the-scenes power in Hollywood in the Golden Age.

Gaines's thoughtful book takes a more theoretical approach, flagged by that ironic title. There were no 'pink slips' handed out to women filmmakers – what happened to them and their careers is more complex than a mere dismissal. Suitably, Gaines seeks to ask challenging questions more than to provide pat explanations. How could one not question the production of history, she suggests, when at different points the dominant narrative has either underestimated or overestimated the number of women at work in the silent film business. She points out that when large numbers of women work in an industry, their presence is not commented upon, and that women in front of the camera will always be more visible than those behind it.

Then, the stage is set for Gaines's compelling "history-as-critique", which dives into tricky textual matters, such as whether Alice Guy-Blaché really did make the much-vaunted first fiction film, *La Fée aux choux* (1896), and the practice of restoration and preservation that provides us not with original historical objects but with facsimiles.

And should our histories of women in film include those who "stayed at the bottom" as well as those who "rose to the top"? In one intriguing chapter, Gaines discusses whether it might be possible to include stenographers, freelancers and "janitresses" in studio histories. In all, it's hard to disagree with Gaines's suggestion that "in 'representing' these women today we say more about our contemporary selves that we do about historical selves" – a useful check on the rescue fantasy of revisionist history.

Smyth's book, meanwhile, is not content with existing histories either, writing that those narratives which "have painted the industry as monolithically male and hell-bent on disempowering women" must be challenged and over-written. Among the scores of women featured in this passionate and highly readable, even chatty, book, Smyth seems to have two guiding lights: star Bette Davis and screenwriter Mary C. McCall Jr. Davis, whom Smyth quotes as saying "women owned Hollywood for 20 years", is her model of a feminist film star. She details Davis's power within Warner Bros, and her career strategy as a freelancer; her bravery and single-mindedness in resisting Hollywood glamour; and her stint as the first female president of the Academy. McCall Jr was likewise the first female president of the Screen Writers Guild, and fought tirelessly for its members, only to be marginalised by those later writers called historians and journalists.

Bette Davis, whom Smyth quotes as saying 'women owned Hollywood for 20 years', is her model of a feminist film star

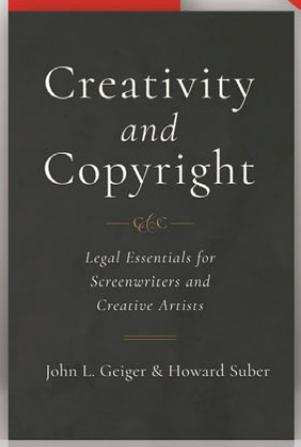
Smyth makes room for many more, including costume designers, editors and producers, as well as a handful of high-powered secretaries, from Kay Brown to Ida Koverman, who took on more and more creative and management tasks until "they were nobody's girl Fridays but their own". Although Ida Lupino and Dorothy Arzner certainly figure, it's clear that the fields of cinematography and directing lagged behind in the gender parity stakes – which makes this by default an appealingly non-auteurist study of Golden Age Hollywood.

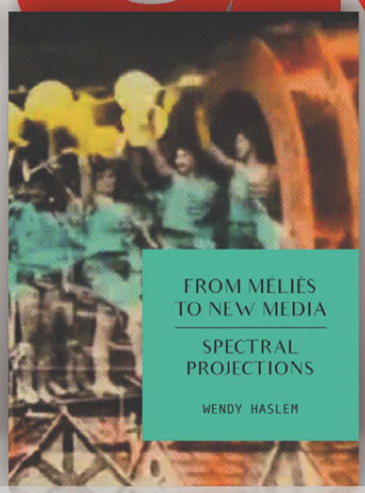
Davis, along with Carole Lombard for example, wins praise for sisterliness, for actively helping women up the ladder. Conversely, in what may strike many readers as a sour note, Smyth devotes her final chapter to Katharine Hepburn, whose "egotism in pure form gave her the courage to survive the studio system". Smyth details the ways in which Hepburn was "no feminist" and made career choices that benefited only herself, not other women in the industry. It's a shame that this needs to be stated, as it risks setting up another oppositional division: Smyth elsewhere quite rightly rails against the media's tendency to reduce "women's presence in Hollywood's past to a series of catfights". That's patently not Smyth's intention, and she can't be blamed for the fact that her preceding chapters have whetted the reader's appetites for more stories of success through solidarity.

As these two studies show, the process of reinstating overlooked female names in the film history books is far from simple or uncontroversial. Many of the questions thrown up during this work might lead us to look again at histories of all film workers, and not just the fluctuating number of women.

Star power: Bette Davis with MGM studio manager William Koenig (left) and her husband Harmon Nelson

Read





CREATIVITY AND COPYRIGHT

Legal Essentials for Screenwriters and Creative Artists

By John L. Geiger & Howard Suber, University of California Press, 200pp, paperback, £14.99/$18.95, ISBN 9780520303539

This elegant, short reference is the perfect guide for creative artists and screenwriters looking to succeed in the industry around the globe. Readers will quickly understand the laws that govern creativity, idea-making and selling, and learn how to protect themselves and their works from legal quagmires. In an indispensable resource for beginners and experts alike, John L. Geiger and Howard Suber use real-life case studies to cover topics such as clearance, contracts, collaboration and infringement.

"*A must read for those who create original work and want to understand the line between copyrighted material and what they create.*"(Mike Medavoy, film producer and former studio head)

"*Geiger and Suber make crystal clear a topic every writer struggles to understand. Put it on your bookshelf next to the dictionary and thesaurus.*"(Daniel Pyne, showrunner, screenwriter and author)

bit.ly/2PgN880

BRITPOP CINEMA

From Trainspotting to This Is England

By Matt Glasby, Intellect, 230pp, paperback, £18, ISBN 9781783209873

The Britpop movement of the mid-1990s defined a generation, and the films were just as exciting as the music. Beginning with *Shallow Grave*, hitting its stride with *Trainspotting*, and going global with *The Full Monty*, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, *Human Traffic*, *Sexy Beast*, *Shaun of the Dead* and *This Is England*, Britpop cinema pushed boundaries, paid Hollywood no heed, and placed the United Kingdom all too briefly at the centre of the movie universe. Featuring exclusive interviews with key players such as Simon Pegg, Irvine Welsh, Michael Winterbottom and Edgar Wright, *Britpop Cinema* combines eyewitness accounts, close analysis and social history to celebrate a golden age for UK film.

www.intellectbooks.com/britpop-cinema

FROM MÉLIÈS TO NEW MEDIA

Spectral Projections

By Wendy Haslem, Intellect, 201pp, paperback, illustrated, £25, ISBN 9781783209897

From Méliès to New Media contributes to a dynamic stream of film history that is just beginning to understand that new media forms are not only indebted to but firmly embedded within the traditions and conventions of early film culture. Adopting a media archaeology, this book will present a comparative examination of cinema including early film experiments with light and contemporary music videos, silent film and their digital restorations, German expressionist film and post-*noir* cinema, French gothic film and the contemporary digital remake, Alfred Hitchcock's films exhibited in the gallery, post-medium films as abstracted light forms and interactive digital screens revising experiments in pre-cinema. Media archaeology is an approach that uncovers the potential of intermedial research as a fluid form of history. It envisages the potential of new discoveries that foreground forgotten or marginalised contributions to history.

www.intellectbooks.com/from-melies-to-new-media

PANDORA'S BOX

BFI Film Classics

By Pamela Hutchinson, British Film Institute, 112pp, paperback, illustrated, £12.99, ISBN 9781844579662

Pandora's Box (*Die Büchse der Pandora*, 1929), starring Hollywood icon Louise Brooks, is an established classic of the silent era. Pamela Hutchinson revisits and challenges many assumptions made about the film, its lead character and its star. Putting the film in historical and contemporary contexts, Hutchinson investigates how the film speaks to new audiences.

BFI Film Classics introduce, interpret and celebrate landmarks of world cinema, including Weimar-era classics *Metropolis*, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu* and more.

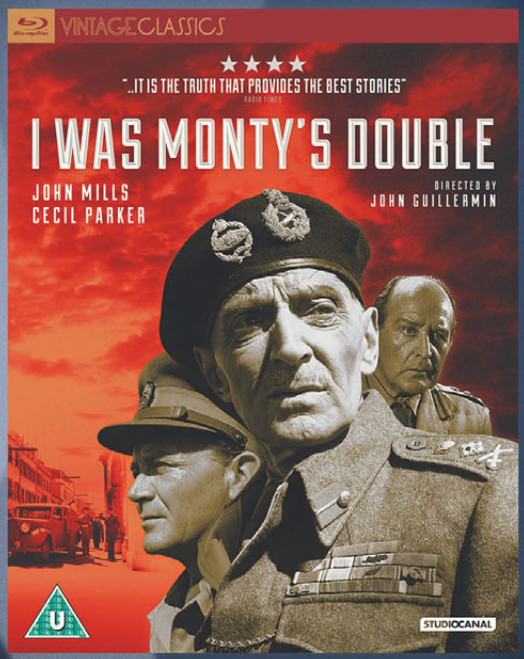
Browse the entire series at:

www.bloomsbury.com/BFIFilmClassics

VINTAGE CLASSICS

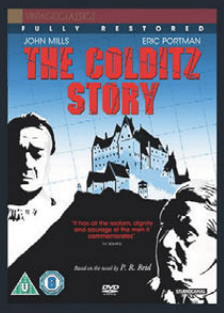
STUDIOCANAL

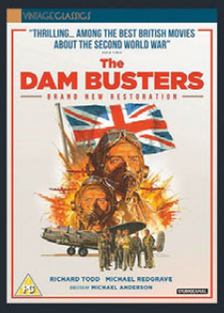
NEW RESTORATIONS COMING TO BLU-RAY & DVD

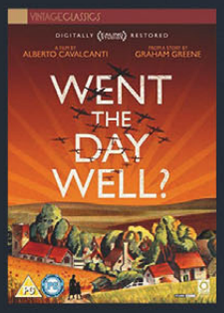


CELEBRATING THE TRUE STORIES OF WWII HEROES IN BRITISH FILM

OTHER WAR FILMS IN THE COLLECTION







© 2019 Studiocanal All Rights Reserved.

Available at

amazon.co.uk®

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders.
Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details.
Amazon, the Amazon logo and Amazon.co.uk are registered trademarks of Amazon EU SARL or its affiliates

STUDIOCANAL

FEEDBACK

READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN
Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

SWEET MEMORIES

To learn from Matthew Sweet how fraught the final Stan and Ollie tour was is enlightening ('Failing better', *S&S*, January/February). My Dad and I were in the third row at the Finsbury Park Empire in 1953. It was an evening of great happiness for me, not far behind seeing Jimmy Durante at the Palladium. And Laurel and Hardy got an enthusiastic reception. As I remember it, they re-enacted two of their movies. Strangely, I cannot recall the first; but the second was, I believe, the one in which they are staying in a cheap hotel and demolish the room. I sat wondering how they would fix everything up for the next show. I also remember thinking how great their timing was in all this mayhem – as perfect as in their films.
Donald Mcwilliams *Montreal, Canada*

INTEREST POLICY

In his response to James Piers Taylor's question about how your magazine now defines films for the reviews section, Nick James says that the question to ask is: "Is this an interesting film?" (Letters, *S&S*, May). What a wonderful criterion! That may sound cynical, but it's not. Whether a 'film' is *The Assassin* (2015), *Get Out* (2017), *Song of Granite* (2017), *Babylon Berlin* (2017-), *Twin Peaks, the Return* (2017), a Storyville documentary, a DVD extra (like an interview with Andrei Tarkovsky), the music composed for a film that brings the images flooding back or even a daft piece of experimentation in an art gallery – it's all film!
Tony Partridge *Sligo*

BORDER PATROL

It was pleasing to read both a fair review of *Border* and an appreciative feature about the film and its director Ali Abbasi ('The misfits', *S&S*, April). But it's disappointing that neither writer of the respective pieces had read the short story source by John Ajvide Lindqvist that was the film's source. It's a short and easy read in English translation, available in the collection *Let the Old Dreams Die* (2013). Knowledge of the story might have led to a more informed review and a more interesting discussion with Abbasi, not least since his wonderful film, it seems to me, is an improvement on the story in some ways.
Paul Caspers *Hamburg, Germany*

FLIGHT OF FANTASY

In his review of *Tolkien* (*S&S*, May), Philip Kemp says that the film is "told with enough affection, and visual élan, to keep the fanbase more than happy". I suspect that Tolkien fans are more likely to be resistant to the film's charms, not just because of the liberties it takes with history, but also because of the way it suggests that the writer's work was directly inspired by his youthful experiences – the 'club' he formed at school inspiring the idea of the 'Fellowship', the battles of World War I influencing his vision of Mordor, etc. There may be some truth in this, but it is too neat and simplistic. (The film even resorts to a touch of pop psychology when it implies that Tolkien can only move beyond the trauma of losing his friends in war when he starts to write his major fantasy novels.)

Still more egregious is the way that, when Tolkien is suffering from trench fever and hallucinating, the imagery is drawn straight from the Peter Jackson franchise – a clear case of film eating film. It is not only a rip-off; it implies that Jackson has fixed forever the way audiences should imagine Tolkien's world.

There is something distasteful, too, in re-envisioning the horrors of WWI as Hollywood fantasy spectacle. My own warning to Tolkien fans would be: this is a film to avoid.
David Allen *Birmingham*

LETTER OF THE MONTH
THE WANDA YEARS

In her review of Maya Montañez Smukler's *Liberating Hollywood: Women Directors and the Feminist Reform of 1970s American Cinema* (Books, *S&S*, May), Isabel Stevens errs in stating, "There had been only two female directors working in Hollywood in the sound era: Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino." Like most accounts, that leaves out Wanda Tuchock. Primarily a screenwriter, Tuchock in 1934 received co-director credit on the RKO feature *Finishing School* (above); she also wrote the screenplay with Laird Doyle, from a story by David Hempstead. Tuchock's other writing credits included such major films as *Show People* (1928), *Hallelujah* (1929) and *The Champ* (1931). It's likely that her co-director on *Finishing School*, George Nicholls Jr, was put on the film to backstop her with the technical aspects. He was an editor who went on to direct 13 other films and (without credit) the dreadful reshoots that helped ruin John Ford's 1936 RKO film of Sean O'Casey's play *The Plough and the Stars*.

***Finishing School* is a lively, smart drama about a repressive school for young women, from which an initially conformist rich woman (Frances Dee) manages to break free. It's sort of a Hollywood version of *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931) without the lesbianism. The film adroitly handles Dee in a sensitive leading role, Ginger Rogers as her rebellious friend, Beulah Bondi as the stern headmistress and the usually stiff Bruce Cabot in a recognisably human performance as a medical student who overcomes class prejudice to wind up with Dee. The ending is improbable wish-fulfillment, but *Finishing School*, though minor, has a keen eye for class issues and a graceful, relaxed style, with a frank approach to sexuality. It's too bad Tuchock was only able to direct one other film, a 1952 short entitled *Road Runners*.**
Joseph McBride Berkeley, California

ROCKY HORROR PICTUREHOUSE

Further to the discussion about theatrical release and streaming platforms (Editorial, *S&S*, May; Letters, May and June), I want to express my concern about Picturehouse's recent tightening of its theatrical windows policy, resulting in the exclusion of Curzon releases [see The Numbers, page 11]. I only discovered this when investigating why neither Picturehouse venue in Brighton was showing *Vox Lux*, and am disappointed to realise they won't be showing *In Fabric* or *The Souvenir* either. Many of my visits to Picturehouses have been for limited releases of films I've read about from the festivals, and I have counted myself lucky that I live near a decent arthouse cinema.

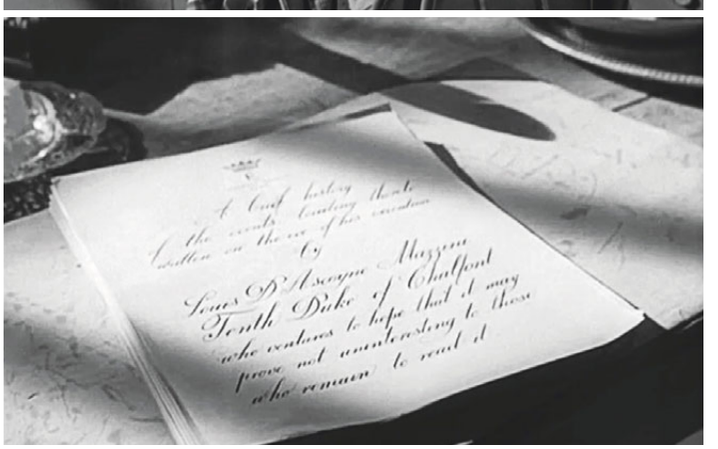
However, Picturehouse is now behaving like its parent company, Cineworld. This wrongheaded and petty move will upset and alienate film fans. Instead of being decent arts cinemas which show a wide range of interesting and niche films, I fear they will eventually become a Cineworld with nicer seats, artisan snacks and wine.
Esther Sherman *Brighton*

Additions and corrections

June p.48 *Diamantino*: Certificate 15, 96m 37s; p.50 *John McEnroe In the Realm of Perfection*: Certificate 12A, 94m 35s; p.54 *The Crossing*: Certificate 12A, 99m 30s; p.58 *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*: Certificate 15, 110m 4s; p.59 *Freedom Fields*: Certificate PG, 95m 43s; p.61 *High Life*: Germany/France/United Kingdom/Poland/USA 2018 ©Pandora Film Produktion, Alcatraz Films, The Apocalypse Films Company, Madants, Andrew Lauren Productions, The British Film Institute, Arte France Cinéma; p. 67 *Memoir of War*: Certificate 12A 126m 6s

ENDINGS...

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS



The final moments of Robert Hamer's jet-black comedy bring its antihero down to earth – and place Dennis Price among the stars

By Andrew Roberts

"My memoirs!" Louis Mazzini, Tenth Duke of Chalfont, cries at the end of director Robert Hamer's jet-black comedy. Louis has emerged with perfect sang-froid from prison to greet his public. His death sentence – for a murder he didn't commit, rather than any of the multiple murders he did – has been overturned, and he now faces a choice: his "vain, selfish, cruel, deceitful" but "adorable" mistress Sibella (Joan Greenwood), or the charmingly glacial Edith D'Ascoyne (Valerie Hobson). "How happy could I be with either, Were t'other dear charmer away," he muses. But that's before he is approached by an innocuous little man in a bowler hat, who prompts Louis's sudden, awful realisation that a single careless mistake has in a stroke undermined his deviously elaborate scheme.

Louis is the protagonist and narrator of *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949). After his widowed mother has been cut off by her aristocratic family – the D'Ascoynes, dukes of Chalfont – for marrying an opera singer, Louis is brought up in suburban poverty. When the D'Ascoynes refuse her dying request to be buried in the family vault, Louis sets out to eliminate the eight relatives (all played by Alec Guinness) who stand between him and the dukedom.

Louis is played by Dennis Price. Price had been spotted on stage by Michael Powell, who noted his "impudently well-mannered" tones and cast him in *A Canterbury Tale* (1944). He was contracted to Gainsborough, which promoted him to larger roles while showing little grasp of his talents: the picture immediately before *Kind Hearts*, *The Bad Lord Byron* (1949), was a critical and commercial disaster. Later, Price said he was "not a star. I lack the essential spark. I am a second-rate feature actor" – which was wholly untrue.

Then Hamer appointed Price our guide to *Kind Hearts*: the story is recounted by Louis in flashback, writing his memoirs in his cell as he awaits execution (Terence Davies has called his narration the greatest of all cinematic voiceovers: "There isn't a flaw in it"). Perhaps Hamer saw the vulnerability beneath the impudence. One of Price's most notable achievements is showing that the wounded boy is ever present, and that it is only an urbane detachment that allows Louis to maintain his poise. A closeted gay man, Price understood having to sustain a false persona for public consumption. Louis is a natural actor, be it in the guise of a draper's assistant (his first, humiliating job), a prominent young banker (as the D'Ascoynes unwittingly take him to their bosom) or even a visiting bishop (the role he adopts to murder the Rev Lord Henry D'Ascoyne).

In the final moments of *Kind Hearts*, Louis has finally avenged his mother, and is ready to play the role he has spent decades preparing for – so he barely notices the journalist who approaches him to request the rights to his memoirs.

One of Dennis Price's most notable achievements is showing that in Louis the wounded boy is ever present

Arthur Lowe's cameo as the journalist is a masterpiece of obsequiousness. Louis's body-language suggests he is about to lavish patrician courtesy upon this social inferior; then the full import of the question strikes him. Price's reaction is brilliant: he repeats the line "My memoirs!" three times – first with mild bemusement, then in realisation, finally with horror, his mask of sang-froid shattered. The American version of *Kind Hearts* included an unnecessary, censor-pleasing scene of the documents in the hands of the authorities, but the British cut has the perfect ending; a shot of the manuscript lying on a table in Louis's recently vacated cell, now agonisingly out of reach, laying out in meticulously incriminating detail the full extent of his murderous crimes, and just waiting for the prison guards, perhaps, to pick it up.

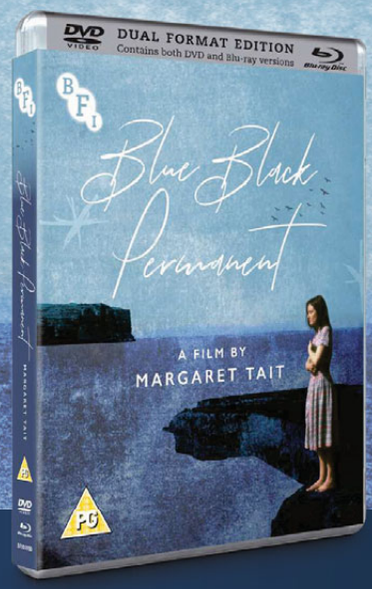
There is a certain poignancy in our final sighting of Price in a leading role worthy of his talents. Within five years he would be starring in B features: his later career encompassed character roles in *Tunes of Glory* (1960) and *Victim* (1961), and in 1959 his delightful gentleman-spiv was a highlight of *School for Scoundrels*. That film was supposed to be directed by Hamer too, but by then the filmmaker's demons meant that Cyril Frankel replaced him. It is best to recall these two rare talents at their peak as *Kind Hearts and Coronets* draws to its ambiguous conclusion.

***Kind Hearts and Coronets* has just been rereleased in UK cinemas**

BFI Film Forever

A true original

THE GUARDIAN



MARGARET TAIT'S MAGICAL AND HAUNTING FEATURE FILM

NEW 2K RESTORATION

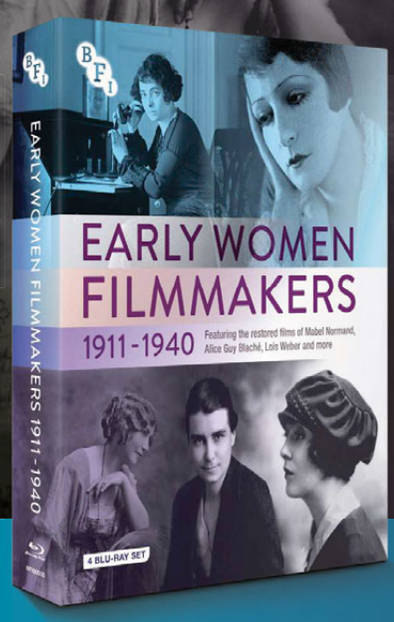
AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY / DVD AND ONLINE

Buy on iTunes Store

BFI PLAYER

BFI SHOP

BFI Film Forever



'PROOF THAT MANY OF THE FIRST, BEST FILM DIRECTORS, WERE FEMALE'

PAMELA HUTCHINSON, SIGHT & SOUND

REDISCOVER EARLY CINEMA'S MOST INNOVATIVE FEMALE DIRECTORS

FEATURING 25 RESTORED FILMS BY: MABEL NORMAND, ALICE GUY-BLACHÉ, LOIS WEBER AND MORE

ORDER FROM BFI SHOP

BFI MEMBERS ENJOY 15% OFF

FROM THE ACADEMY AWARD© WINNING WRITER / DIRECTOR OF ***THE LIVES OF OTHERS***

FLORIAN HENCKEL VON DONNERSMARCK

MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA Official Selection

SEBASTIAN KOCH TOM SCHILLING PAULA BEER

Official Selection tiff Toronto International Film Festival

2 ACADEMY AWARD© NOMINATIONS

BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY

IN CINEMAS JULY 5

Modern Films ModernFilmsEnt ModernFilmsEnt www.modernfilms.com/neverlookaway

15 STRONG SEX, NUDITY, THREAT

PERGAMON FILM · BUENA VISTA INTERNATIONAL · ARD Degeto · BR · medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg · FFF Bayern · mdm · Deutscher Filmförderfonds · FFA · sky · Rai Cinema · arte · Modern Films